

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • September 2021



**NSEA U 2021 in Review:
Guidance, Growth, Gerry Brooks
and Giraffes!**

Also inside:

- **Honest Approach Needed in Education**
- **Delegates Attend Representative Assembly**
- **Help for Student Loan Debt**

THE VOICE

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**A Great Public School
for Every Child.**



Tune in: NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Randy Gordon and Associate Emme Grafton speak about the key points of negotiating salary and benefit contracts during NSEA University.

Bargaining season nears

Welcome to the new school year! The fall brings with it new opportunities in the classroom, as well as a new opportunity to negotiate your salary and benefits.

Collective bargaining is a tool Nebraska educators can use to improve their working conditions and pay. Topics like salary, insurance packages, plan time and professional development hours all can be negotiated. In order to make that happen, your local association must be recognized by the employer as the bargaining agent for the year, or certified as the permanent bargaining agent for your school.

NSEA's Collective Bargaining Specialist Randy Gordon offers the following tips for local associations as the bargaining window approaches this fall:

- Stay in touch with your NSEA organizational specialist about upcoming bargaining opportunities and available resources, including the bargaining calendar and updated sample negotiated agreement.

- Community college and K-12 locals should prepare and submit their 2023-24 recognition request letter now so the board can act on recognizing the local as the bargaining agent for next fall's negotiations of the 2023-24 agreement. (Certified locals, prepare your notification letter for the board.)

- Survey association members about issues and priorities *before* you head to the bargaining table.

- Access NSEA's microsearch database of current agreements at www.nesa.org/collective-bargaining.

- Organize your negotiations team so roles and responsibilities are clear during both preparation and bargaining.

- Be ready to begin negotiations by Nov. 1 for K-12 and community college locals and by Sept. 1 for state employee groups.

- Stay in touch with your organizational specialist throughout the process. They can help you comply with the bargaining calendar, learn more about area settlements and be aware of trending language proposals being offered by other district boards.

Would you like to write for The Voice?

Would you like to write 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: NSEA University in July was a fun-filled three days of professional development, relaxation and networking for NSEA members. Read more about the annual event on pages 8 and 9.

Turn on your radio, Nebraska

Twenty-four years ago, the NSEA began a partnership with the Nebraska Broadcasters Association to support and provide information to Nebraskans about our public schools. I am pleased to report that partnership is still going strong.

Over the past year, more than 100 radio and television stations across Nebraska aired NSEA's messages more than 18,800 times.

I recently recorded a series of new radio messages that will air throughout the 2021-22 school year. The messages include back-to-school tips, parent-teacher conference information, and support for our students, parents, teachers, education support professionals and our great Nebraska public schools.

It is an honor to be able to reach thousands of Nebraskans each day with these messages and to let them know that our public schools are doing great things in all corners of the state. Here's a taste of what you'll hear when you turn on your radio and tune in.

Parents make a difference

Caring teachers and involved parents make the difference in a child's learning. Our teachers and ESPs want every child to have a great public school.

Parent-teacher conferences are a key ingredient to your child's academic achievement. Head into your conference with plenty of notes and questions. Share details with the teacher about your child and life at home. Ask about your child's strengths and weaknesses in the classroom, how they interact with classmates and how you can be supportive.

Our public school teachers want every child to learn, grow and succeed. It's key to build a partnership with your child's teacher. Visit with them, and ask for an overview of your child's strengths and areas for growth. Ask for recommendations for activities and opportunities so you can work with your child to harness their strengths and address their challenges.

Teachers continue to innovate

The past year and a half has been a challenge, but parents, students and our Nebraska public school educators adapted, innovated, and continued teaching and learning.

I taught for more than 35 years. Educators are used to the challenges of a typical school year, but the last year-plus was far from typical. Yet, everyone leaned in and found creative ways to adapt, innovate and persevere.

Behind each student were resourceful families and dedicated educators who reached out with open arms of support. Because of all the ways we worked together, our students continued to learn, grow and thrive.

Stay healthy so we can stay in school

We've been reminded of the importance of following health and safety guidance from medical experts. As teachers, our goal is to keep our schools open and our students in the classroom. Because we know in-person teaching and learning is best for our students.

We know the best learning for our kids happens when they are in classrooms, in person, with their classmates and



Tune in: NSEA President Jenni Benson records new radio spots featuring tips for parents and support for Nebraska's public schools.

teachers. To help keep our public schools open for in-person learning, please follow health and safety guidelines from medical experts.

Lay the foundation with good habits

It's a new school year, time for parents and kids to establish habits that will encourage learning. Parents, you can help your child succeed in school by creating good study routines. Pick a time and a quiet place for homework, ask what happened in school, and establish bedtime routines so your child will be rested, ready to learn.

Turn off the TV and power down the video games. As a teacher, mom and grandmother, I know children need a quiet place to do homework. Designate an area in your home away from the TV and background noise. Good study habits start with a quiet learning environment at home.

Make time for reading every day

Your child's most important school supply is free, and fits in a pocket. It's their library card, and it's important to use that card often. Your local library can unlock a whole new world for your child. Explore it together. The library is a great place to learn and spend time together.

There's no better way to spark a child's imagination than to get lost in the adventure of a good book. You can help by reading to your child, and let your child read to you. Encourage reading in your home, and make it a priority. Make reading fun and a time that you and your child look forward to spending together.

Standing Up to COVID

I Love Public Schools shares student stories in latest documentaries

High school can be a challenging time – especially in a pandemic. I Love Public Schools, an organization dedicated to supporting public education, captured first-hand accounts from students about their experiences during the unprecedented school year stemming from COVID-19.

During the pandemic, I Love Public Schools heard from a lot of adults – educators, teachers, health officials and others who were putting practices in place, orchestrating plans, rearranging plans, and starting over again as the waves of COVID changed the course of the school year. One voice that needed to be heard was that of Nebraska's students.

Most of the 244 school districts in Nebraska returned to school in-person, part-time or full-time, for the duration of the 2020-2021 school year.

From Bellevue to Grand Island, to smaller rural communities like Aurora and Atkinson, the “Standing Up to



See it: [Watch the “Standing Up to COVID” series and other I Love Public Schools films at iloveps.org/films.](https://iloveps.org/films)

COVID” documentary film series interviewed more than 15 students about their experiences.

“COVID has taught me to be patient

and to be OK with not knowing and to not have to have complete structure,” said Dani, a student from Bellevue West. “It’s OK to have fluidity or open-mindedness or to not accomplish something someday, having to be able to take that mental health day and know my limits and to know what makes me work as a person.”

During the most critical moment in modern history, I Love Public Schools asked questions about students’ day-to-day lives and how they discovered new routines.

The films provided an outlet for students to express their feelings about the most isolating and challenging parts of the pandemic.

The series showcases how each experience was unique – and yet somehow universal to the experience of all of us this past year.

These stories demonstrate the incredible strength of returning to the classroom amid a new normal.

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Students deserve honesty in education

Kids deserve to know the truth. Preventing them from learning the real history of our country is nothing but a disservice to future generations.

One phrase that has newly taken over headlines and is being debated by state governments – critical race theory – is not new at all.

What is Critical Race Theory, really?

Critical race theory is a college-level theory that explains how race is still tied to our legal and societal systems. That's it. It's a theory. It is not a whole curriculum.

It is not an entire textbook. It's a theory.

The theory does not teach that one race is better than another, and it should not further divide us. To a large extent, it's not even something that is being taught in schools.

The theory itself dates to the early 1970s. It was first used in university law classes to analyze how the legal and physical infrastructure of our society is based on division – on purpose.

Education Week explained well what the theory is with this example: "In the 1930s, government officials literally drew lines around areas deemed poor financial risks, often explicitly due to the racial composition of inhabitants. Banks subsequently refused to offer mortgages to Black people in those areas."

This practice is known as "redlining," and it's still evident today. It can be seen in the examples of where public bus routes do and don't run, where supermarkets are built and not built, and how big or small public parks are in certain areas. These issues drive problems like poverty, hunger, poor health and homelessness.

What about teaching it?

A survey by the Association of American Educators in late June found that of the mostly public and charter school teachers who responded, only 4.1% said they were required to teach the theory. Yet, 81% said curricula should include stories from a diverse set of backgrounds, narratives and cultures – many of which are left out of current textbooks.

These stories and narratives offer all students a more complete and honest look at the history of our country and culture. They show not only the contributions of white people to our nation's founding, but the contributions of all people, regardless of race, gender or physical ability.

"Imagine searching through the library at your school and not being able to find a children's book with a single character who looks like you. It'd be frustrating, and it would make you feel excluded, like your thoughts and abilities are not important," NSEA President Jenni Benson said. "By censoring diverse stories and mandating what

cannot be talked about in classrooms, we'd be doing just that: telling others they are not important. That's not the message our educators want to send to the next generation of our country."

Where does NSEA stand?

The Nebraska State Education Association believes decisions about curriculum and instruction should be made locally by individual school districts, classroom teachers and parents. As professionals, educators believe that all students deserve honesty in education, and it is these professional educators—not pundits or politicians—who know how to best design age-appropriate lessons for students.

Elected delegates to the National Education Association's Representative Assembly in June passed a new business item that conveys its "support for the accurate and honest teaching of social studies topics, including truthful and age-appropriate accountings of unpleasant aspects of American History." The item does *not* mandate teaching any one theory but rather states its opposition to censorship.

What's with the politics?

Unfortunately, over the past few months, some dishonest and divisive partisan politicians and news pundits are stoking fears about our schools to push a political agenda. These politicians and news pundits have launched a highly coordinated attack on the ability of educators to teach the truth about race and racism in our country to students in public schools.

"This is not about teaching a theory," Benson said. "This is pure politics, censorship and a push toward creating distrust in public educators to drive families toward private schools, thereby reducing the state's financial obligation for funding quality public education."

"Politicians are pushing this propaganda because they think this divisiveness will help them win elections. These politicians are trying to censor teachers to stop kids from learning our full history and shared stories of confronting injustice. It is a diversion from the real issues of ensuring our kids have an education that prepares them for success."

Some politicians just want to divide us. But Nebraskans are united in wanting our schools to be the best they can be. The NSEA wants all students to have an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others and courage to do what's right to build a better nation and future for our children.

What's a teacher to do?

"Teachers must continue to ensure their students learn the complete and honest history of our country so they have the skills needed to better understand problems in our society and develop solutions," Benson said.

That includes teaching about the greatness of our country, as well as the moments when our actions as a nation failed to promote the best interests of all Americans.

We are educators, and we are always teaching and learning. It is important that we are open to listening and learning different perspectives. Equity and inclusion are the foundations for reaching and teaching ALL children.



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From the classroom

History is fact, not theory

by Jake Bogus

Over the last several months, I have grown concerned with the attacks on public school history teachers. Angry parents and privileged politicians continue to push a narrative that

history teachers are indoctrinating our students and/or teaching critical race theory. This theory, according to critics, is an attack on our country's core values and pits us against one another.

As an eighth grade history teacher for Lincoln Public Schools, I took the recent criticism personally. It got me fired up. Teaching history is my livelihood. How can people claim to hate the way I teach when they've never even seen my curriculum or stepped foot in my classroom?

Most school district curriculum can

either be accessed through a district website or obtained through communication with a teacher or administrator. While certain skills and ways to obtain the knowledge have changed, the curriculum standards for U.S. History have remained relatively the same the last several years. Good luck finding the words "critical race theory" in any curriculum K-12.

Critical race theory is a college-level course that takes a race-based, critical look at our country's past and how it relates to its laws today. Debating the merits of how critical race theory may affect one's view of their country is a worthy discussion. But the truth can't be debated. History is not theory.

Critical race theory should never be confused with the facts and evidence of the treatment of minorities in this country over the last 400 years.

Africans were forced into ships in the 17th century and brought to America via the Middle Passage. They were beaten, starved, raped, and forced into slavery by white men. They were chained in the bellies of ships with putrid air and very little sanitation.

Slavery was a legal practice and institution in the Americas. The Founding Fathers argued about its morality and economic impact, but it survived for nearly 250 years.

Through Reconstruction, the Jim Crow Era, segregation, and the civil rights movement, minorities (especially African-Americans) were severely mistreated.

These are facts. It is the truth. It's not a race theory. It's not something that indoctrinates anybody who learns it. Sadly, it is part of our country's complex history.

According to David French of Time Magazine, "We should approach history with a sense of curiosity and security. You won't make me hate my home. You can, however, motivate me to preserve what is pristine and repair what is broken. You can make me proud of the beauty and sorry for the injustice."

If knowledge is power and the reason many feel we must learn history is in order to not repeat it, then we must learn the truth. The facts aren't red or blue. And they shouldn't be used as a narrative from politicians or frustrated parents.

When educating young people in history classes, we must provide the truth in background information and then let students formulate their own opinions on our nation's history. Lessons revolve around inquiry questions where students must learn information and properly defend the way they view complex events or characters from our country's history.

George Washington was an incredible military leader that guided our country to victory in the Revolutionary War and became our first president. There is also clear evidence of him verbally and physically abusing the hundreds of slaves he had at his Mount Vernon home.

Thomas Jefferson was said to care about the "common man." He was a brilliant writer who composed the Declaration of Independence. Jefferson is looked at as an icon

of American democracy. In 1998, DNA evidence found Jefferson likely fathered six children with one of his hundreds of African slaves, Sally Hemings. Enslaved women had no right to consent as their masters owned their labor, bodies, and their children.

Woodrow Wilson's diplomacy and leadership as president led the United States to victory in World War I. But he would later defend the South's suppression of black voters, saying they were being denied the vote not because their skin was dark but because their minds were dark. He said "the dominance of an ignorant and inferior race was justly dreaded."

These are just a few examples of the complexity of our country's history. It's OK to view prominent American men and women as flawed heroes. But in order to fully understand the past and how to make the future better, we must educate our students with the truth. As American journalist Harry Smith said, "It endangers no one to understand the sins of our past."

As I learned these complexities and the horrible blemishes of our country's past as a white man, it has only helped me want to make this country a better place for my children and people of color. The guilt I feel because of the way others were treated by men of my same race has only inspired me to make our country a better place for all – not one where we are pitted against each other.

As French from Time Magazine puts it: "History lessons shouldn't be designed to create patriots. They should be designed to educate citizens – secure in the knowledge that well-educated citizens are most apt to learn to love their nation well."

So how do we handle this new attack rhetoric as public school history teachers? We do what we do best – educate.

Jake Bogus is an eighth-grade U.S. History teacher at School Middle School in Lincoln.

“

The curriculum standards for U.S. History have remained relatively the same the last several years.

Good luck finding the words 'critical race theory' in any curriculum K-12.

”

Relaxed and Refreshed

Fun at the zoo: Millard members Tonya Stutzman (left) and Julie Williams stop for a photo with a giraffe at the Lincoln Children's Zoo. The zoo night was part of NSEA University in July.



NSEA U jump starts new year with learning, humor

Developing professional skills, relaxing and having some fun were the intent of NSEA University held in July at Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln.

A night at the Lincoln Children's Zoo, coupled with a hilarious keynote address by Kentucky principal and educational humorist Gerry Brooks, provided just that for the 130 Nebraska teachers who attended the three-day event.

Attendees also heard from history-maker Bakari Sellers, who was the youngest African American elected official in the nation as a South Carolina legislator. Sellers spoke about the importance of including all parts of history – even the ugly parts – while educating young people.

Professional development sessions featured information on trauma-informed teaching, collective bargaining, mindfulness, compassion fatigue, how to run a meeting, and higher education issues.

Members also had the chance to visit with NSEA President Jenni Benson, hear from Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt and members of the State Board of Education, and analyze their local association data.

Awards announced during the virtual Delegate Assembly in April were presented at NSEA U, so award winners could receive the honors in person. Honored award winners included:

Maira Méndez Rodríguez and the Children of Smithfield

The Great Plains Milestone Award, given by NSEA's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, recognizes an individual or group that has promoted the development, advancement, and protection of human and civil rights in their community. The NSEA and EMAC honored Lincoln Education Association member Maira Méndez Rodríguez and her grassroots group, "The Children of Smithfield."

They stepped up to be the voice for their parents, who work in meatpacking plants, to push for better working conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic, raising public awareness and urging public officials to insist on improvements in the plants, where workers stood shoulder-to-shoulder and were not given proper personal protective equipment or necessary sick leave.

The National Education Association also honored the group with its highest and most prestigious award, the César Chávez Acción y Compromiso Human and Civil Rights Award.

Mikaela Vobejda Principal, Golden Hills Elementary

The Administrator of Excellence award was bestowed for the first time in 2021 to an administrator who strives to help students and staff be successful.

The inaugural winner, Mikaela Vobejda personified those traits in her first administrative position, one that has so far lasted eight years. In her nomination, Golden Hills staff members in Bellevue wrote, "She faces every problem not as a problem, but an opportunity to grow. She is not afraid to get her hands dirty, kick off her heels, and get on the floor to work one-on-



Outstanding advocate: Maira Méndez Rodríguez and the Children of Smithfield received the Great Plains Milestone Award.



Excellent admin: NSEA Vice President Robert Miller presents the inaugural Administrator of Excellence award to Mikaela Vobejda.

one with a student in crisis. As a former classroom teacher and special education case manager, she continues to remember what it is like to be in the classroom. Her support of public education includes an emphasis on the importance of being a member of professional organizations.”



TV Partner: Andy Ruback, CEO of Flood Communications, accepts the Champion of Education Award on behalf of News Channel Nebraska for its partnership on Teacher TV. Ruback is pictured with a few of the NSEA members, governance and staff who were a part of the statewide project.

News Channel Nebraska

When schools abruptly closed their doors in the spring of 2020, teachers were not about to quit teaching. NSEA worked with teachers and the statewide television network News Channel Nebraska to quickly begin broadcasting daily doses of Teacher TV. This gave students all across the state the chance to continue learning six hours a day from their living rooms.

For their outstanding work in covering education issues and promoting community involvement in education through Teacher TV, the NSEA presented News Channel Nebraska with the 2021 Champion of Education Award.

University of Nebraska Medical Center Global Center for Health Security

NSEA'S 2021 Friend of Education stood unwavering through uncertainty. The University of Nebraska Medical Center's Global Center for Health Security is recognized internationally for its expertise in emerging infectious diseases, biopreparedness, patient care and innovative, life-saving research. The center was quick to act when the first Americans exposed to COVID-19 returned to U.S. soil.

The center played an instrumental role in researching the novel coronavirus and in getting information in the hands of public health officials and schools. Nebraska students and teachers greatly benefited from this research, resulting in relatively few outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools and keeping our educators and students teaching and learning safely. The NSEA recognized Chancellor Dr. Jeff Gold, Executive Director of Education Dr. John Lowe, and Executive Director of International Programs and Innovation, Dr. James Lawler, and Associate Vice-Chancellor for Clinical Research Dr. Christopher Kratochvil.



Health experts: NSEA President Jenni Benson thanks Dr. Christopher Kratochvil, right, and Dr. John Lowe of the UNMC's Global Center for Health Security.

Additional Awards

Children's Fund

**Papillion-LaVista
Education Association**
Highest Total Gift

**Battle Creek
Faculty Association**
Highest Per Capita Gift

William Gallagher Jr. Award

Metro District

Presented in honor of William Gallagher Jr., one of NSEA's first field staff employees, who died in a car accident while on duty in 1972. The award recognizes the governance district that enrolls the largest percentage of eligible members within that district.

Early Career Educator

Hana Krommenhoek
Omaha Education Association

Presented each year to honor dedication, service and excellence during a teacher's first five years in education.

Award for Teaching Excellence

Lee Perez

Omaha Education Association

Presented for outstanding teaching, advancement of student learning, advocacy for the teaching profession and leadership among colleagues.

Education Support Professional of the Year

Travis Vo

Westside Education Association

Presented for outstanding dedication to supporting students, teachers and patrons throughout the district.

Community Service Award

2 Strings for Lincoln

Karen and Mandy Faripour

Presented for selfless support of and compassion for the community in the midst of a global pandemic.

Local Association Public Relations Award

Andrew Nabity

Papillion-LaVista Education Association

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CDC recommends masks as Delta variant surges

As the COVID-19 virus continues to mutate, communities across Nebraska are seeing a new wave of coronavirus cases. Timing to reduce the spread is crucial as students return to their classrooms for in-person learning this fall.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends universal indoor masking for all teachers, staff, students and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

Both the CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics state that students benefit from being at school in-person instead of learning remotely. Universal masking is critical to keeping kids in school.

The AAP states that the Delta variant is 200% more transmissible and results in up to a thousand times more viral load inside a person's body compared to the original SARS-CoV-2 virus. That's similar to the contagiousness of chickenpox and higher than that of smallpox. On average, one person carrying the virus can infect between six and 10 others.

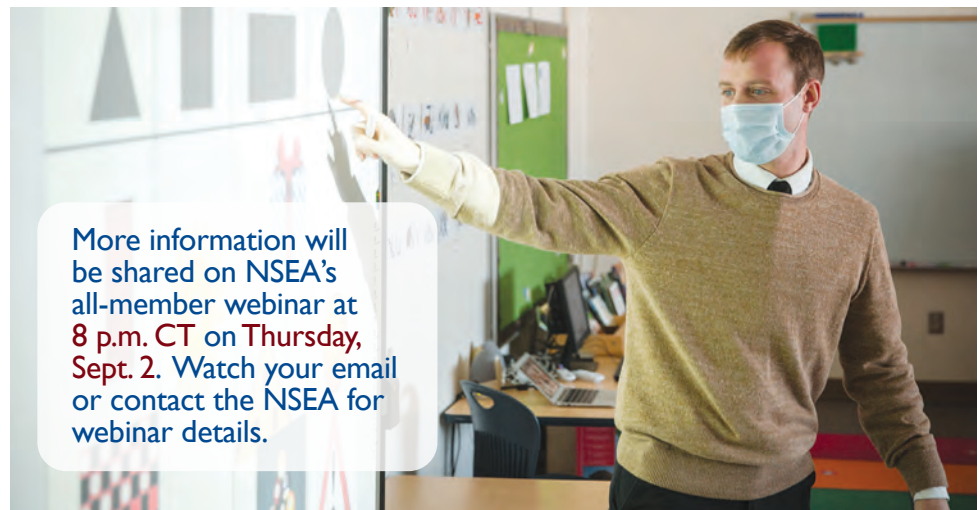
Vaccinated individuals are still able to spread the virus to others, though their own symptoms may be less severe. As of Aug. 12, only 39% of 16- to 17-year-olds and 27% of 12- to 15-year-olds were fully vaccinated in the United States.

The Nebraska Child Health and Education Alliance encourages teachers and students over age 12 to get a vaccine.

A vaccine is not yet approved for children under age 12, so using multiple prevention strategies is highly recommended to help protect our youngest students and their families.

Prevention strategies continue to be frequent handwashing, maintaining physical distance, covering coughs and sneezes, frequent and thorough cleaning and sanitation, testing for the virus after potential exposure, and quarantining when sick.

The NSEA encourages Nebraska educators to follow this guidance from the CDC and other health experts. Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), text your ZIP code to 438829, or call 1-800-232-0233 to find out where vaccines are available in your community.



Wear a mask: NSEA encourages educators and schools to comply with CDC guidance and wear a mask while in school, regardless of vaccination status.



Layered Prevention Measures

Keep Kids Safe

Proactive COVID-19 prevention measures, even prior to readily available vaccination, were effective in allowing schools to safeguard in-person education as much as possible. In this context, schools should implement a combination of **vaccinations, universal masking and other layered prevention measures** including disease surveillance, home isolation of infected staff and students, quarantine of unvaccinated people exposed to an individual with COVID-19 to protect the health of students, teachers and staff, and community members at large.



Know the Facts.

- 1 **Delta is 200% more transmissible and results in up to a 1000x higher viral load compared to previous variants.**
- 2 **On average, one person infects 6 to 10 people.** This is similar to the contagiousness or transmissibility of chickenpox and higher than the transmissibility for smallpox.
- 3 **Vaccinated individuals who become infected can spread the Delta variant to others.**
- 4 **Many children haven't had the opportunity to be protected by the COVID-19 vaccines. Currently, only those ages 12+ are eligible for the vaccine.**
- 5 **Only 39% of 16-to-17-year-olds and 27% of 12-to-15 year-olds are fully vaccinated in the United States.** (AAP, July 20, 2021)

What the Experts Say

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** and the **American Academy of Pediatrics** strongly recommend that in order for schools to remain open, which is of critical importance to the education and well-being of children and families, public health measures must be instituted and adhered to, including universal mask wearing.

All about the Delta

New and more transmissible variants of SARS-CoV-2 virus, particularly the **Delta variant**, represent a threat for many Nebraska communities heading into the fall of 2021. The Delta variant is significantly more transmissible than previous versions of the virus causing COVID-19, and it appears to cause more severe disease, even in younger people.



No Immunity Wall for Kids

Not enough kids are protected for an effective immunity wall. Many children haven't had the opportunity to be protected by the COVID-19 vaccines. Getting shots into the arms of eligible children is essential to protecting them from this virus.

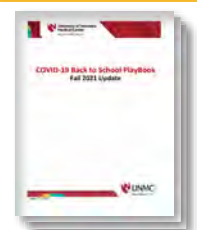


Download the Fruitful COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign Toolkit

www.childrensomaha.org/fruitful2021

<https://bit.ly/UNMCplaybook>

Download the UNMC COVID-19 Back to School Playbook



Go to [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), text your ZIP code to 438829, or call 1-800-232-0233 to find where vaccines are available in your local community.



Music in memory: Alumni singers gather in the Bayard park July 17 to perform in memory of 34-year Bayard music teacher and longtime NSEA member Sharon Hoffman, who died Dec. 7, 2020.

Students sing for beloved Bayard music teacher

The teachers who touch students' lives are remembered long after graduation. Longtime NSEA member Sharon Hoffman of Bayard made a profound impact that led nearly 70 of her music students back to Bayard after she died.

Alumni hosted a music memorial in Hoffman's honor, gathering to sing in the Bayard park on July 17. The event included a hog roast and T-shirt sales, as well as a GoFundMe page, to raise money for a scholarship that will be given in Hoffman's name to students wishing to become music educators.



Sharon Hoffman

"Mom had three children who followed in her footsteps to become music teachers," Hoffman's daughter Sarah Consbruck said, "but she had hundreds of kids."

Those hundreds were the students who passed through her music room throughout her 34 years at Bayard Public Schools.

Hoffman directed the award-winning choir, varsity swing choir, underclass swing choir and a guitar class. She also started a junior high

swing choir and a jazz choir, and directed the band for a time.

Performers at the memorial spanned Hoffman's three decades of teaching: some from her first year student-teaching in 1979, and some from her final year teaching in 2012. They sang music they had learned under Hoffman's direction.

"I wanted to be a performer," Hoffman's daughter Michaela Babic said, "but the more I got into my classes, the more I realized that the reason I loved it so much is because of the educational experiences she had provided for us. That was really where my passion was – the experiences provided along the way."

"One thing that my sisters and I learned from my mom is that through music you can affect change," her son Jacob Hoffman said. "Not all students are going to go into music, but in music you can teach them hard work ethic. You can teach them how to work as a team. It really helps to be in those groups and learn how to be a more complete human. I think Mom really embodied that."

In the late 1980s, Hoffman's master's thesis helped shape the rules of maternity leave in Nebraska schools. She was named the Nebraska Music Educators Association Outstanding Music Educator of the Year in 2006 and earned the same from the Nebraska Federation of High Schools in 2007.

Her family and former students noted how she taught all of her students with the same love and compassion, regardless of their background or how well they did in school.

Her husband, Ron, attributed this to her accomplished musicianship, but also to her mastery of the process of music instruction.



All in the family: Sharon Hoffman's family includes (from left) daughter Michaela Babic, son Jacob Hoffman, husband Ron Hoffman and daughter Sarah Consbruck. Michaela, Jacob and Sarah all became music teachers and NSEA members.

"She helped people grow into who they were," Ron said. "If they had the confidence to sing a song, they had the confidence to apply for a job. They grew as people, and they grew as individuals, and they grew as a group. She did teach great music, but she grew people. That's what she was all about."

The Sharon Hoffman Memorial Scholarship Fund has a goal of raising \$15,000. Contributions may be made at gofundme.com/f/sharon-hoffman-memorial-scholarship.

'It all started with a scholarship'

"A great teacher creates ripples across generations of students the way a stone creates ripples across the water. As Sharon was graduating high school in 1974, she was presented with a choice. The local phone company was hiring secretaries at \$8 an hour, a fortune for someone who grew up poor at that time. Chadron State College offered her a \$250 scholarship to join their music program. Much to the horror of her mother, who could not imagine anyone turning down \$8 an hour, Sharon chose the scholarship.

"As her legacy, we want to continue to create ripples. The Sharon Hoffman scholarship will be available to deserving students wishing to become music educators, who may need a little help or a little push to reach their full potential—students like Sharon."

—Excerpt from "Ripple Ceremony" for Sharon Hoffman

UNO developing cybersecurity curriculum with Navy grant

Guidance to keep kids safe from online hackers, scammers

A new and engaging resource is now in development at the University of Nebraska at Omaha to help educate the next generation on staying safe from online hackers and scammers.

UNO'S STEM TRAIL Center is developing a new cybersecurity curriculum that includes fully developed, engaging lesson plans and hands-on activities focused on keeping students safe from online harm.

The curriculum will feature a book of cybersecurity activities including illustrated cartoons, short videos, activities and scenarios to make the lessons both engaging and educational. Ultimately it will be available for middle and high school educators.

The cybersecurity curriculum is being developed by UNO as part of its NE STEM 4U program, which aims to increase interest and understanding of STEM topics for socio-economically disadvantaged K-12 students. The project is made possible thanks to a grant award from the Office of Naval Research.

As the next generations get their hands on newer technologies that connect them with the world, it is critical to help them stay safe and not fall prey to scams and phishing attempts.

Something as simple as clicking a malicious link in a text message or joining a compromised wireless network could lead to trouble. Even those who have been using online tools for years can let their guard down and make a simple mistake that compromises their identity, online and financial accounts, and/or sensitive personal information.

Christine Cutucache, Ph.D., director of UNO's STEM TRAIL Center and project lead, and principal investigator of the grant, believes that



Cyber secure: A group of cartoon characters will help guide students through UNO's new cybersecurity curriculum, which will be available to middle and high school educators within the next year.

these lessons are critical as students increasingly face cybersecurity threats.

"Kids are carrying computers in their pockets, mostly unsupervised—it's all of our duty to ensure that the skills of cybersecurity are offered for multiple generations simultaneously and to provide engaged programming using scaffolded learning," she said.

In addition to helping students become more cyber-aware themselves, the curriculum aims to help students keep their family and friends safe from cyber threats.

Through funding from the United States Navy, the project also aims to support a cyber-aware, cyber-secure, and cyber-prepared citizenry. Fostering an interest in STEM fields early on may also lead students to choose educational pathways that ultimately lead to a cyber-related career with the Navy.

The full curriculum will first be rolled out to about 20 programming sites across Nebraska and at the STEM TRAIL Center within the next year, and then will expand throughout the Heartland in year two and across the U.S. in year three.

Additional STEM Resources now available online

While UNO's new cybersecurity curriculum is still in development, a recent completion of other science, technology, engineering and math activities can be accessed in a book or as individual lessons and can be viewed, downloaded and printed free of charge at <https://bit.ly/3yRpULF> or by searching for the UNO STEM TRAIL Center.

The website includes activities in chemistry, biology, engineering, physics, geology, math and more for K-8 classrooms.

The goal is to provide students with engaging activities while also fostering an interest in STEM that might lead them to pursue a future in a related field.

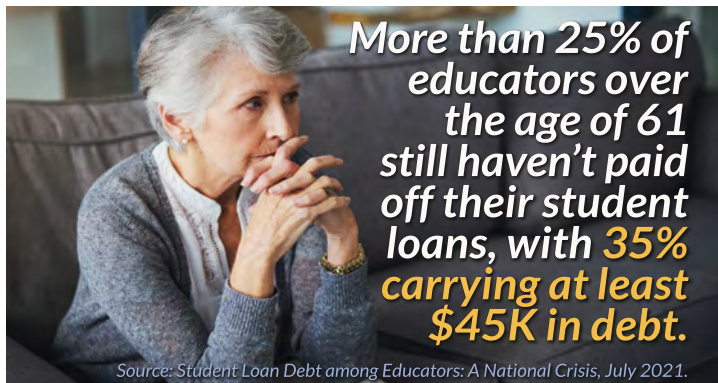
Student loan debt mounts for all demographics of educators

NEA reports crushing debt statistics, offers help for new, past borrowers

In July, the National Education Association released new research into the impact of student debt held by educators.

The study shows that outstanding student loans are a significant hinderance to the financial lives of pre-K-12 and higher ed educators, regardless of years of experience.

“The cost of college imposes a ‘teacher penalty’ on educators, saddling them with a lifetime of debt before they even enter the classroom,” NEA President Becky Pringle said.



More than 25% of educators over the age of 61 still haven't paid off their student loans, with 35% carrying at least \$45K in debt.

Source: Student Loan Debt among Educators: A National Crisis, July 2021.

Public Service Loan Forgiveness fails

The NEA has called for the Department of Education to forgive all outstanding debt for educators with 10 or more years of experience – what the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program is supposed to do – but it's not working as intended.

The PSLF Program was set up in 2007 to forgive the student debt of public service workers such as educators, bus drivers, firefighters, health care professionals, librarians and others who have served their communities while making consistent payments on their student debt for 10 years. Yet only a tiny fraction of these workers – about 2% of those who have applied – have had their debt forgiven.

The devil is in the details of the program, said Eric Harrington, senior legal counsel for NEA.

In order to qualify for forgiveness, borrowers must meet ALL of these criteria: 1) have a direct federal loan, not a commercial loan; 2) can't consolidate loans because it resets the payment clock; 3) must recertify employment with a qualifying employer every year; 4) must be on the right income-driven repayment plan; and 5) must make 120 payments in those 10 years.

“Since 2017, 98% of all the people who apply for PSLF have been denied,” Harrington said. “Either they were misled by their servicer, they were told to consolidate, they weren't in the right repayment plan, or they never got the right loans in the first place.”

Even when the details line up, Harrington said, many are still denied because of the way the program is administered.

Important findings

■ About 59% of educators with loans reported the debt affected their ability to build emergency savings. Four in 10 said student loans impacted their mental, emotional or physical well-being.

■ Black educators took on significantly more debt than other racial/ethnic groups, with an average initial total of \$68,300, compared to \$54,300 for White educators and \$56,400 for Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic and Chican(o/a/x) educators. Sixteen percent of Black educators who used student loans borrowed \$105,000 or more compared to 11% of White educators.

■ Black educators with unpaid student loans also had the highest average current debt at \$71,600, over \$13,000 more than White educators and \$20,000 more than Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic and Chican(o/a/x) educators. Nearly one in five Black educators with unpaid debt carries a current balance of at least \$105,000.

■ Two-thirds of educators ages 61 and up with unpaid student loans report paying down their debt has affected their ability to save for retirement.

■ Student loan debt has caused educators to put off or give up hope of buying a home, returning to school or starting a family.

Get help with student loans at:

www.neamb.com/student-loan-debt

An increasing problem

Erika Taylor, senior research analyst at NEA, said student loan debt in the U.S. has increased steadily from about \$500 billion in 2007 to nearly \$1.6 trillion in 2020.

Because of skyrocketing tuition costs and other economic factors, student loan debt now exceeds auto loan debt and credit card debt, second only to mortgage loan debt.

“We believe this problem is particularly difficult for educators, because we know you live it, and because studies have also shown that on average teachers earn lower salaries compared to the amount of education they actually earn to do their jobs,” Taylor said.

This often leads to educators leaving the profession because it doesn't pay enough for them to repay their loans. That leads to retention problems and teacher shortages across the country.

Educators of retirement age are often facing “a lifetime of student loans,” Harrington said, having borrowed for their own college expenses as well as those of their children.

“Once the number of student loans gets big enough, the power of compound interest just runs away from you and you cannot claw it back,” Harrington said. “We see this with members who are 60 or 70 years old and have \$100-, \$200- or \$300,000 in debt, when they borrowed \$40,000 25 years before.”

Help through SAVI

Although the current PSLF system isn't working, Harrington said NEA is doing what it can to help members work through their debt until PSLF is fixed.

In 2020-21, NEA has gotten more than \$1.1 million of members' debt forgiven and more than \$285 million of member debt on track for forgiveness.

NEA offers a Student Debt Navigator tool through SAVI.

"It's like TurboTax for student loans," Harrington said, offering personalized support for members so they don't get tripped up on the details.

The navigator is free to members for the first year. Harrington said more than 18,000 members have accessed SAVI, and hundreds of those have gotten loan forgiveness. Find the tool at www.neamb.com/products/nea-student-debt-navigator.

Legal support, too

NEA also offers legal support for members who are entitled to forgiveness but aren't getting it.

"NEA has litigated cases that are really big numbers, and our members are close (to that amount), or they raise questions of national significance," Harrington said.

He said creating political pressure is the next step in getting student debt relief for educators and others.

"During the campaign, President Biden was not a proponent of student debt cancellation. Then later, he committed to a \$10,000 cancellation. Then we put on more pressure to get \$50,000 forgiven for every single member," Harrington said. "A significant percentage of our members would have their student debt completely wiped out."

Included in that effort is a push to keep the promise of public service loan forgiveness, without all the detailed requirements that trip people up.

Harrington said NEA is working with 14 other unions of public service workers to accomplish that goal.

Members can join the more than 25,000 others who have taken action by writing to the U.S. Secretary of Education through the PSLF letter campaign at bit.ly/3iQ7Dc0.



Energy and enthusiasm: National Education Association President Becky Pringle virtually addresses the 2021 Representative Assembly comprised of nearly 8,000 elected delegates representing educators across the United States.

100th RA looks ahead to new challenges, opportunities

For the second consecutive year, the National Education Association's Representative Assembly was conducted remotely June 30-July 3, as many communities across the country continued to struggle with the COVID-19 virus.

Nearly 8,000 delegates came together for the 2021 RA – the 100th Representative Assembly – and 81 of those delegates were elected to represent Nebraska.

Even a historical crisis couldn't stop NEA's three million members from doing extraordinary work, said NEA President Becky Pringle in her keynote address on the first day of the RA.

"I was blown away by your courage and creativity and caring. But I wasn't surprised. It's who you are," Pringle said, "who we are. We lead and love,

teach and learn from a place of deep conviction and powerful purpose.

"You grounded yourself in that, and it became your reservoir of energy that you tapped into over and over again."

That energy and commitment has only strengthened and will be needed more than ever. Crises loom as our schools return to in-person learning, but there are also opportunities.

Pringle said it's up to every educator to imagine a system of shared responsibility where every student is supported and every educator is respected. She urged delegates to ask themselves what they are ready and willing to do to realize this vision in the coming years.

"I do believe the answer to that last question will be: Whatever it takes," she said.



Logged in: Nebraska's 81 delegates joined the 2021 Representative Assembly virtually.

Pediatric leukemia changes one teacher's life in an instant

2020 promised to be an exciting year for Cami Bergman, Seth Holcomb and their family: A new home in Arcadia, a baby, Kyzer, on the way, and new schools for Keaton, 14, Kira, 11, Keely, 3, and Cami herself as a special education teacher in the neighboring town of Ansley.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic threw the entire world for a loop in the spring, it was Keely's ear infection in October that turned their upside-down.

Ten days after first seeing the pediatrician in Grand Island and starting antibiotics, Keely's earache still hadn't subsided. Bruises were popping up, and her skin took on a yellowish hue. They went back for another visit.

"The doctor's tone was different when he came back to the exam room that time," Cami recalled. "With tears in his eyes, he said, 'An air ambulance is on the way to take Keely to Omaha. The Hematology-Oncology team at Children's [Hospital and Medical Center] is waiting for you.'"

A \$75,000 plane ride for Keely, a two-hour drive for Cami and Seth (they couldn't fly with their daughter because of COVID-19 protocols) and less than 24 hours later, the diagnosis was official: Pre-B Cell Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

The first thought going through Cami's mind was fear that she could lose her baby girl to this cancer, which affects a person's ability to fight infections. Concern for the rest of her family, her job and finances closely followed.

"I remember walking into the hallway and letting myself cry for the first time," Cami said. "And that's when Karen, the case manager from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, called to see how we were doing and how she could help. I was worried about how to pay for everything, but she reassured me it would be OK."

Fortunately, Cami had met her deductible after giving birth to Kyzer in February, and Ansley Public School officials were understanding and generously provided administrative leave and continued benefits for as long as she needed.

Cami and Keely made the 178-



Keely's Krew: Leukemia was no match for now-4-year-old Keely (front) and her family: (from left) Keaton, Seth Holcomb, Cami Bergman, Kyzer and Kira.

mile trek from their house to Children's Hospital and Medical Center many times over the next year for treatments. They learned a lot along the way about cancer and the power of community – with other patients and parents, medical staff and kind neighbors. Keely lost her hair and, on occasion, her spunk and strength to walk; but they never lost hope.

In June 2021, 4-year-old Keely joyfully entered "maintenance" and is on track to conclude treatment by the end of 2022. She started pre-kindergarten this fall – and Cami is back to teaching in Ansley.

For more than 30 years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska has supported the Educators Health Alliance and NSEA in providing access to trusted doctors, coverage for needed care and support from a team that's here in Nebraska. BCBS is grateful for all educators do for students and communities and is proud to be part of educators' stories.

Cami and Keely's health journey is just one of many. To see more of it and share yours to inspire others, visit NebraskaBlue.com/YourStory.

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Ed Summer program draws new members

The best people to speak out for educators are fellow educators. Colleagues understand the profession – and the benefits of an association that has your back.

The NSEA launched its Education Summer program in June, and tasked a group of member organizers with making connections and inviting new members into their local associations.

For eight weeks, these organizers hosted new hire orientations, social events, networking activities and more. Their goal was to build strong local associations with long-term organizing capacity. The associations will be well-prepared to respond to the needs of their members, students and communities. In the process, organizers signed up more than 240 new NSEA members!

Retirement Seminars help map out next steps

Retirement for an educator often seems far away. Is it time to evaluate your decision about leaving your career in education? How do you prepare for retirement and what do you need to know?

The NSEA Retirement Seminar Team is here to support your transition to retirement by explaining the NPERS retirement plan.

For 2021-2022, virtual retirement presentations are pre-set on the second Monday in odd months (Sept. 13, Nov. 8, Jan. 10 and March 14) and the second Tuesday in even months (Oct. 12, Dec. 14, Feb. 15 and April 12). All virtual presentations will begin at 7:30 p.m. CT and last one hour.

Local leaders and governance districts also may request to host an in-person seminar. Though seminars are offered free of charge, NSEA membership and pre-registration are required for all seminars.

To register for a seminar or to request consideration for your local to host an in-person presentation, go to nsea.org/retirement.

Millard receives Safe and Just Schools grant

Karyn Lawrence, NSEA member and music teacher at Millard Public Schools, earned a \$5,000 Safe and



Preparing together: NSEA and Tri-Valley District leaders, members and staff recently gathered for a summer retreat in Kearney.

Just Schools grant from the National Education Association on behalf of the **Millard Education Association**. The grant will be used to implement a “Drumming for a Culturally Responsive Classroom” program this school year.

The Safe and Just Schools Partnership Funding Program awards dollars to state and local affiliates to fund projects and partnerships that address systemic inequities and unjust education practices that hinder healthy, safe and just learning and working environments.

Aspiring Educator speaks at commencement

Hastings College graduating senior **Andy Streck** of Alda was the featured student speaker at the college’s commencement ceremony in May. Streck was a member of the NSEA-Aspiring Educators, serving as treasurer while majoring in elementary and special education.

Mikkelsen earns Friend of Education award

The Millard Education Association presented NSEA Political Field Operations Director **Brian Mikkelsen** with the MEA’s “Friend of Education” award on June 7.

Mikkelsen was a strong voice for the NSEA this past spring, working to qualify educators as essential workers and making COVID-19 vaccines available to them.



Friend of Education: Millard Education Association President Tim Royers, left, presents NSEA Political Field Operations Director Brian Mikkelsen with the MEA’s “Friend of Education” award.

In Memory

We recognize these educators and NSEA members whom we’ve lost in the last few months.

Roger Barry, 86, Schuyler
Donna Fredrick, 93, Grand Island
Helen Oltrogge, 91, Wilber
Barry Skalberg, 47, Grand Island
Eloise Stewart, 88, Crofton



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File or shred? A guide to keeping financial records

It's easy to get overwhelmed by a mountain of financial paperwork. Where do you keep it? How long do you keep it? Should you switch to online only?

By paying all bills and credit card balances online, you'll save a decent amount over a year in postage costs. Banks will often apply a fee for paper statements, with the larger ones charging \$2 to \$3 per month, according to MyBankTracker.

If you opt for paper, here are recommendations on how to manage the documents you collect.

Mortgage and loan statements: A monthly mortgage or auto loan statement only needs to be kept until the next statement arrives, according to Clark.com, the official website of consumer expert Clark Howard. Check the latest statement to make sure your current balance reflects payments made. As with any discarded financial document, it's best to shred it rather than toss it in the trash, so your personally identifiable information stays protected. Once you receive a final statement that your balance is paid in full, keep it long-term in a file you can easily access. A standard filing system should work, or you might consider buying a safe or using a safe deposit box at a bank.

Tax returns and supporting documents: How long should you keep tax records? Clark.com recommends keeping a copy of every year's tax return. Old tax returns can help you prepare for future ones, and it's always a good idea to have these on hand in case the IRS has a question. Keep supporting tax documents (such as your W-2, mortgage interest/taxes paid statement, receipts for classroom expenses that you paid out of pocket and can deduct, receipts for self-employment expenses, etc.) for seven years—the limit for which the IRS can request these items from you.



Monthly bills: Hold on to bills such as utility, cable and cell phone until you verify that payment was processed. If you or your spouse generate any self-employment income (if you tutor students on weekends, for example), some of these expenses may be deductible, so you'll want to store a year's worth unless you can

get an annual summary either on paper or online after Jan. 1. Then, if you use these annual statements to support deductions, keep them for seven years.

Retirement savings accounts such as 403(b)s: File the monthly/quarterly statements until you receive your annual one, and then shred the monthly/quarterly updates. Store your annual statements indefinitely, at least to back up your online statements.

Banking and credit card statements: Keep these for a year. If you make purchases related to taxes, home improvements, work/self-employment expenses, etc., have those on hand for at least seven years. A bank will retrieve statements for you, but anything older than two years is considered "research," and the average charge for this is \$25 an hour.

Receipts: Store these until you can verify that your bank or credit card statement is accurate and the warranty/return period has passed, then shred them, unless they also serve as tax supporting documents.

Pay stubs: Hold on to these for a year so you can check the accuracy of your W-2 when tax season arrives. Then keep the W-2 for at least seven years in case of an IRS audit.

Insurance policies: It's safe to shred old policy paperwork once you receive the new ones.

Learn more about finances and find helpful tips about budgeting, credit and managing debt at neamb.com/personal-finance.

Put your membership to good use: \$ave money!

Your NEA member benefits include member-exclusive discounts at these companies and more.

Find details on these deals and search for your favorite retailer on the NEA Discount Marketplace page at www.neamb.com/products/nea-discount-marketplace.

Bed Bath & Beyond

Find everything you need to refresh your bedroom, kitchen or bath for fall. There are plenty of dorm-room specials for the college-bound! Order online with options for in-store or curbside pick-up and even same-day delivery.

Nike

Energize your exercise routine with the latest clothing, footwear, workout gear, gym bags and more. Sign up to

be a Nike member (it's free) and enjoy free standard shipping!

Samsung

Discover the latest in electronic and smart appliance technology with Samsung. Find the next big thing—from smartphones, tablets, laptops and flat screen TVs to complete kitchen and laundry appliance suites.

Green Chef

Feel good about weekly delivered meals from this USDA-certified organic company that sources sustainable ingredients. Choose meal plans for two to six people from categories such as Keto/Paleo, Balanced Living and Plant-Powered. Check out sign-up bonuses offering additional savings.

Office Depot and OfficeMax

NEA members get discounts on classroom and home office supplies, electronics, print services and more.

- Save up to 75% off OfficeDepot.com's regular prices on its Best Value List of preferred products.
- Order online and pick up in one hour, if order placed is placed one hour before closing time.
- Free delivery on qualifying orders of \$50 or more (see website for details).

Costco

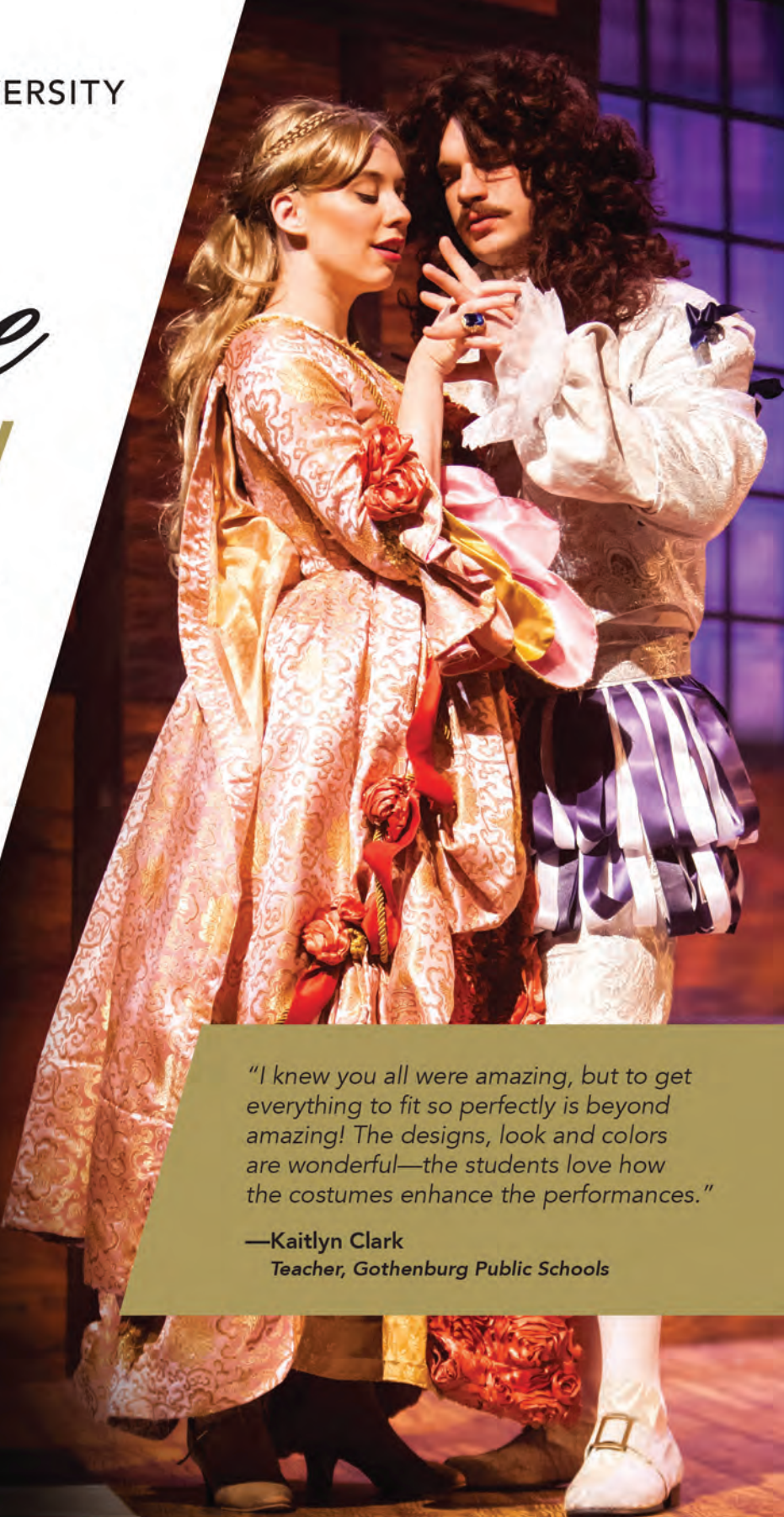
From clothing and footwear to backpacks, lunchboxes and classroom supplies, Costco has everything you need to start the school year off right. NEA members obtaining a new Costco membership will receive a \$30 Costco Shop Card.

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—Kaitlyn Clark
Teacher, Gothenburg Public Schools

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Three weeks, thousands of miles

I always feel melancholy this time of year as I watch all of you prepare for a new school year. Even though it's been about seven years since I had my own classroom, dreams of lesson plans (OK, those are nightmares) and welcoming a new batch of "Ms. Fennell's kids" still float across my subconscious as I sleep.

But one of the things I love about this job is that I get to travel around the state and welcome all of you back to another school year! Your NSEA officers and managers have traveled thousands of miles across Nebraska highways and interstates to deliver materials, greet members, listen to summer joys and concerns, and discuss key issues that members are raising as the year begins. Here are some of the concerns we've discussed.



Executive Director Maddie Fennell

“

The NSEA does not take a position on any standards. There is a process for determining standards, and we believe teachers need to be integrally involved in that process.

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Teaching Certificates

The Nebraska Department of Education has a backlog in processing certificates. Some of this is because of their system, but it also is because of late applications. Note that you can apply for your certificate starting in January of the year you need a new one. Nebraska Commissioner of Education Matt Blomstedt has issued guidance that allows for school systems to hire a teacher if they have a pending certificate renewal application, allows for substitute teachers to work with a pending substitute teacher application; and allows for additional days for local substitute teachers (beyond 90 days) as currently outlined in Rule 21.

Blomstedt also is providing flexibility around instructional hours, as he did last year, if requested by the school district. The guidance can be found at www.launchne.com/21-22/commish.

Health Standards

Perhaps one of the most frustrating things is hearing so much misinformation being spread around the state. Two topics educators frequently expressed concerns on were health standards and the continued impacts of COVID-19.

The NSEA believes that ALL children should be welcomed in our schools, and as our President Jenni Benson often says, “ALL means ALL.”

However, the NSEA does NOT take a position on any standards. There is a process for determining standards, and we believe teachers need to be integrally involved in that process.

While many standards are mandated for accreditation, the health standards are not; they

are optional. Once the standards are approved by NDE, each school district will determine their application.

Our positions on a myriad of issues can be found in the Association resolutions – which were written, debated and approved by our members at Delegate Assembly – at nsea.org.

COVID-19

Sadly, the Delta variant is on the rise. On a recent statewide call, we were told there are virtually no pediatric beds available in Nebraska because of the rise of both COVID and RSV.

Nebraska medical experts are predicting an exponential COVID rise if we do not use mitigating factors – vaccinations, masks, social distancing, frequent cleaning and handwashing.

While many argue about the virus, full hospitals mean that if you or your family have an emergency, you will have to wait. The strain will impact

everyone who needs critical care – a kid who breaks their arm, stroke victims, those who have a heart attack, cancer and surgical patients.

Hospitals will run out of staff before they run out of beds. The nurse-to-patient ratio is the most important factor that impacts patients in the intensive care unit. Many experienced ICU nurses have opted to pursue new non-bedside careers, exhausted from the previous round of COVID.

My husband, a conservative lawyer who has studied the Constitution deeply, shared the following with me from Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson. In *Terminiello v. Chicago*, Jackson claimed that “[t]his Court has gone far toward accepting the doctrine that civil liberty means...that all local

attempts to maintain order are impairments of the liberty of the citizen. The choice is not between order and liberty. It is between liberty with order and anarchy without either. There is danger that, if the Court does not temper its doctrine logic with a little practical wisdom, it will convert the constitutional Bill of Rights into a suicide pact.”

School districts and elected leaders have not just the legal authority but a moral imperative to keep students and staff as safe as possible. This means they can determine policies – including masking, vaccinations and COVID testing – that are instituted for health and safety. Just as NSEA has fought to have our members involved in school safety committees and decisions, we will continue to fight for the health and safety of our members.

Nebraska Child Health & Education Alliance Guidance Returning to School Safely Fall 2021

Vaccinations

Masking

Layered Prevention Measures

Keep Kids Safe

What the Experts Say

All about the Delta

No Immunity Wall for Kids

Know the Facts

Go to nhs.uk/covid-19 to find where vaccines are available in your local community.

Return safely: The Nebraska Child Health and Education Alliance released new guidance about returning to school safely this fall. Read more at www.childreksomaha.org/fruitful2021.

LEA-Retired: Come and get it!

Lincoln Education Association-Retired gathered new and used classroom materials and items for a “Come and Get It” event for new educators and those transitioning to Lincoln Public Schools.

The giveaway was held at the Lincoln Education Association office July 30-31.

Many retired members and LEA members helped to donate, organize and greet educators as they came to gather items including bulletin boards, classroom materials, posters and children’s books. Additional items came from a similar event held by the Omaha Education Association. Books remaining after the event were donated to the People’s City Mission, whose bookshelves had become bare.

Part of the solution

Retired Wilber-Clatonia teachers Sarah Brown and Nancy Fulton worked with Public Health Solutions, the public health agency that serves Saline, Thayer, Gage, Fillmore and Jefferson counties, volunteering to serve at all community COVID-19 vaccination clinics last spring.

The duo met retired Fairbury teachers Cheryl Seachord and Carolea Roelfs, who also helped with several clinics. The four acted as area sterilization workers, helped with patient flow, monitored patient responses and assisted as needed.

October conference plans underway

The NSEA-Retireds are back, one might say, as they plan an in-person NSEA-Retired fall conference for Tuesday, Oct. 26.

The conference will be at the Ramada Inn, 2503 South Locust, in Grand Island.

The morning will begin at 8:30 a.m. with a welcome and refreshments, followed by three breakout sessions with five topics to choose from: Exploring Crop Art and Politics, SHIIP Information and Medicare, Civil War Medicines, Home Solar Installation and Experience, and Travel to Egypt.

After lunch, participants can enjoy music of the 1950s and 60s via Patsy



Preparing to give: From left, Sheri Paden, Barb Hetcko, LEA-Retired President Diane Knapp, Kim Clabaugh and LEA President Deb Rasmussen organize boxes of books and supplies to give away at the “Come and Get It” event.



Vaccination clinics: Retired Wilber-Clatonia teachers Sarah Brown (left) and Nancy Fulton (right) worked with Kate Lange, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Program Coordinator, and Public Health Solutions in southeast Nebraska.

Cline, portrayed by entertainer Melinda Ferree, as well as dessert and prizes.

Morning refreshments and lunch are free for members. The registration fee for additional guests is \$10 per guest.

Registration will be available soon online at nsea.org/retired. Select Calendar, Events and Registration, email Rebecca Smith at rebecca.smith@nsea.org or call the NSEA at 1-800-742-0047. The deadline to register is Sunday, Oct. 17.

Grant available for local retired chapters

Each of the eight NSEA-Retired local chapters may apply for up to \$1,000 for local events or projects in 2021-22.

Funds may be used for social events or programs. Members may invite other retired educators, encouraging membership. Other ideas include using funds to support Educator Rising groups, Aspiring Educator groups or

new educators throughout the state.

To apply and discuss possibilities, contact NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at (402) 525-4264 or dtonack@neb.rr.com.



Award winning: Organizational Specialist Megan Lyons, left, and Assistant Director of Communications Emily Hemphill share the award certificates.

Corner, Advocate win National Awards

The NSEA-Retired Corner in *The Voice* and the NSEA-Retired *Advocate* newsletter earned two communications awards from the NEA-Retired this summer. The Corner earned first place and the Advocate tied for first in their divisions.

NSEA staffer Emily Hemphill designs the Corner, and OS Megan Lyons works on the Advocate, both with news items submitted by Retired President De Tonack and other retired members.

“We also extend our thanks to retired Al Koontz for his continuous work through the years for the Retired Corner,” Tonack said.

Submissions for either publication may be sent to dtonack@neb.rr.com.

Frequently Asked Questions: LB147

Bill defines substitute teaching rules for retired educators

What is LB147?

LB 147 is a bill passed by the Nebraska Legislature in 2021. Among other things, it set a limit on the total number of days of intermittent unpaid voluntary service and/or intermittent substitute service a school plan member may work during the 180 days following termination of employment.

How did LB147 change termination of employment and retirement distribution rules?

LB 147 did not change several important rules.

A member may not take a distribution from retirement if the member prearranged a return to work with any employer covered by the school plan, and unless the member is the one to terminate employment.

A member does not terminate employment for retirement purposes if the member provides service to any employer participating in the school plan within 180 calendar days after the member's termination date, unless the service is limited, voluntary service provided on an intermittent basis and/or limited substitute service provided on an intermittent basis.

LB 147 changed the termination rules by defining "intermittent basis" and "day of service."

What does "intermittent basis" mean?

"Intermittent basis" means no more than 8 days in a calendar month of voluntary and/or substitute service provided on a day-to-day basis (no prearrangement).

What does "day of service" mean?

"Day of service" means any length of voluntary and/or substitute service provided during a single calendar day (whether that is 5 minutes or 8 hours of service).

When do LB147's rules take effect?

The law became effective May 27, 2021. This means members and employers must immediately begin limiting, tracking and documenting voluntary and/or substitute service performed by school plan members who terminated within the past 180 calendar days.

Can I work 8 days of voluntary service and an additional 8 days of substitute service in a calendar month during the 180 days after termination?

No. A member is limited to a combined total of 8 days of voluntary and/or substitute service in each calendar month regardless of whether it is all voluntary, all substitute, or a combination of both.

Can I work 8 days at one district and 8 more days at another district in the same month?

A member is limited to a combined total of 8 days of voluntary and/or substitute service in each calendar month across all employers covered by the school plan. A member who retires from a school covered under the OSERS plan may work or

volunteer 8 days a month at an OSERS school and any amount of time at a non-OSERS school. A member who retires from a school covered under the NPERS plan may work or volunteer 8 days a month at an NPERS school and any amount of time at a non-NPERS school.

Can I agree to return to train my replacement?

No. This is a prearranged return to work. Further, training a replacement is regular service, not substitute service. Substitute service is defined as temporarily backfilling for a permanent employee who is temporarily absent.

Can I complete 8 days of paid refereeing, officiating or coaching during each calendar month of the 180 days following termination?

No. Refereeing, officiating and coaching are considered regular employment for retirement purposes. If these services are provided during the 180 days following termination, then the member has not incurred a bona fide separation of service.

Additionally, a bona fide termination of service does not occur if the employer and member prearrange the member's return as a referee, official or coach before the member terminates even if the prearranged return time is outside the 180-day period.

What happens if a member does not follow these rules?

If NPERS determines a bona fide termination did not occur, NPERS is required by law to:

- (a) Collect missed contributions from the member (with applicable interest),
- (b) Collect missed contributions from the employer (with applicable interest),
- (c) Have hours of service and compensation reported for the member by the employer, and
- (d) Collect back any distributions made to the member (with applicable interest).

In short, the member would be required to pay back any retirement benefits received during this time.

How will these days be monitored?

NPERS has sample logs members and employers can use to document the service performed during the 180 days after termination. The logs are designed to have the member enter their service, have the employer(s) verify the service (by signing and dating the log), and have both the member and employer keep a copy of the log so they can produce it when asked to document service after termination.

Employers may develop their own logs. However, the logs should include all the information shown on NPERS logs.

LB 147 gave NPERS authority to hire another auditor. Its Internal Audit Team is incorporating new testing protocols as part of their auditing process, including requiring employers to produce documentation showing voluntary and/or substitute service during the 180 days after termination. The logs will be cross-checked against payroll and other records to ensure accurate reporting.

Speaking of Education

“Test scores don’t change climate culture. Climate culture does change test scores.

— **Gerry Brooks**
Principal and educational humorist

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

Finders Keepers: OEA starts new teachers off right



It's all free: The Omaha Education Association hosted a “Finders Keepers” gathering in June for first-year teachers and those new to the district. OEA gathered items from retiring teachers and others at the end of last school year, then offered those supplies for free to anyone who could use them – everything from pencils and containers to board games and books. OEA and NSEA members served as personal shoppers, helping the 80 attendees think through what they might need and load it up, while offering advice for the first-year teachers. OEA provided lunch, gift card drawings and an opportunity to join. Pictured at left, NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell (left) helps Riana Lurice Prudente, a new member at Marrs Middle School, pack up supplies. At right, NSEA Policy Teaching Fellow Jacquelle Lane (right) offers some tips to potential member Andrea Laudi of Omaha North High School.

Hill earns McAuliffe Prize for Courage

NSEA member James Hill, a Spanish teacher at Lincoln Southwest High School, received the 2021 Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education July 30.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln’s College of Education and Human Sciences presents the annual award to a Nebraska teacher who exemplifies the character of McAuliffe, the first teacher in space, who died in the 1986 Challenger space shuttle disaster.

Hill is known for meeting students where they are and taking their learning further than they thought possible.



Hill

He takes an active role in navigating challenges. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Hill was one of the first teachers to welcome students back to the building, was vocal about the need for evaluating the progress of all learners, and helped other teachers figure out the best way to achieve their objectives under unique circumstances.

“To me, courage in education means doing what is best for kids and holding yourself and others to high standards,” Hill said. “That’s challenging sometimes, especially if you consider what we’ve been faced with over the past year. You could give this award to any teacher for making this year work.”

To learn more, go to cehs.unl.edu/cehs/awards-cehs-community.

Cover all bases for insurance, retirement

As you jump into a new school year, long-time NSEA supporter Horace Mann would like to say thank you for all you do. Your dedication to your students' futures has a lasting impact far beyond when they leave your classroom.

Local Horace Mann representatives want to help make sure you put that same amount of dedication into your own future.

Go to horacemann.com/locator to connect with your local representative. They will set up some time to review your insurance needs and retirement plans and make sure you're on the right track.