

THE VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ♦ February 2017

THE STORY OF THE FIRST CONTRACT

Falls City Educators Led the Way

Also inside:

In the Legislature:

The Not-So-Magnificent Seven

Meet NSEA's New Executive Director

DA 2017: Not Business as Usual

April Assembly Will Celebrate NSEA, Tackle Broad Agenda Includes Invite-Only Gala

On April 21-22, as many as 300 or more NSEA members will gather in Lincoln for the Association's annual Delegate Assembly. This year will not be business as usual.

The 2017 Assembly will celebrate NSEA's 150 years of advocacy for children, teachers and public schools. A Friday evening, invitation-only gala at Lincoln Station will open the Assembly. Delegates registered by **March 24** will receive an invitation.

Saturday's business session will be busy. Delegates will consider a two-year-in-the-making Strategic Plan for the Association's future; will learn of a proposal to restructure Association governance; will elect a president to succeed term-limited Nancy Fulton; as well as elect a vice president and a member of the NEA Board of Directors.

Delegates will consider amendments to the Association's Bylaws and Resolutions, and possible New Business Items.

Bylaw amendments alter NSEA's governing documents. Proposed amendments are due at NSEA 30 days in advance of Delegate Assembly, or by **midnight Tuesday, March 21**.

New Business Items, Resolutions or changes to Standing and Procedural Rules may be introduced early in the Saturday morning, April 22, business session. However, in order to be included in the printed delegate workbooks, these items must be submitted to NSEA by **Friday, March 31**. Here are details:

- A New Business Item calls for ac-

Delegates to Pilot edCommunities Effort

Delegates to the 2017 NSEA Delegate Assembly are asked to create a personal account through the NEA edCommunities website ahead of the April 21-22 event.

Delegates will be approved for participation in the edCommunities NSEA Delegate Assembly page as they register.

The NEA edCommunities site allows educators to converse, share and discuss ideas. Delegate Assembly details will be updated on a regular basis. To create an account, go to:

www.mynea360.org/login

2017 Delegate Assembly: History Ahead

The time you invest in your NSEA is time well spent. It benefits you, your colleagues and your students. One way to invest is to serve as a delegate to NSEA's 156th Delegate Assembly Friday and Saturday, April 21-22, in Lincoln.

Who: Any member in good standing may apply for election as a delegate. Talk to your building rep or local president for details, or call your NSEA field staff member at 1-800-742-0047.

What: Delegates set Association goals, dues and update Bylaws and Resolutions.

Where: Marriott Cornhusker Hotel, Lincoln.

Delegates: Each local association is entitled to representation by one delegate per 50 members, or greater fraction thereof. Thus, any local with 26 or more members is eligible to select one or more delegates, based on membership. Smaller locals band together in 'clusters' to select delegates.

Cost: NSEA covers half a Friday night shared hotel room for each delegate, Saturday breakfast and lunch, and mileage.



tion. For example, "The NSEA shall ask the Legislature to address mental health funding for schools."

■ A Resolution is a belief statement. For example, "NSEA believes all students should have a safe learning environment."

■ A Standing or Procedural Rule governs Delegate Assembly.

Forms for submitting these items can be found at:

www.nsea.org/delegateassembly

Those interested in serving as delegates should register intent quickly, as NSEA cannot expand the block of reserved rooms.

In formal business, delegates will debate and vote on any Bylaws amendments; updates to the Resolutions, which are NSEA's guiding principles; and proposed New Business Items.

Delegates will also set the membership dues amount for 2017-18.

Cover: Nearly 50 years ago, members of the Falls City Education Association took a risky step forward and negotiated the first teaching contract in Nebraska. Learn more on **Page 7**



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Bad Weather, Bad Bills



**NSEA President
Nancy Fulton**

“

I know you would take action to protect your home or family in the face of a coming storm. I hope you would take action to protect your livelihood and profession in the face of the disturbance that is forming inside the halls of the State Capitol.

”

We Nebraskans are generally unfazed when it comes to the daily dose of weather we encounter.

Heat, rain, wind and cold generally come and go and we forge ahead, dealing with whatever the weather forecaster throws our way.

It's when the weatherman begins to toss out terms like “ice accumulation” or “snow event” or “winter storm” that we begin to sit up and pay attention. We might check the furnace, stock the larder, and fire up the snow blower, just to be sure.

If there's a potential snow day ahead, students and teachers alike can get a little antsy as they wonder if the weather will become reality, slide south to Kansas or just evaporate altogether.

Anticipating foul weather is not much different than waiting for the Nebraska Legislature to convene. Those of us in the education community, particularly those of us who work to educate and persuade lawmakers about the wisdom of their actions, experience similar anxiety before the gavel opens the session.

I know you would take action to protect your home or family in the face of a coming storm. I hope you would take action to protect your livelihood and profession in the face of the disturbance that is forming inside the halls of the State Capitol.

Here's why: The pre-session anxiety this year was justified. Legislation has been proposed that could change the face of public education in Nebraska for generations. And those proposed changes, if they come to pass, will not be for the better.

That's why every Nebraska public school teacher must make it a priority this year to be watchful, to be engaged, and to be unafraid to speak out to his or her state senator.

Not-So-Magnificent Seven

There are more than 600 bills for senators to consider this year. Nearly 200 of them deal with education. NSEA has identified seven topics senators chose to address in particularly stormy fashion. They would freeze public education in the past, dry up funding in the future, and set teacher rights back more than 50 years.

We've called those bills the ‘Not-So-Magnificent Seven.’ They reduce the public school funding pie with both big gashes and a thousand tiny cuts. Two separate bills that will like-

ly merge into one would substantially lessen the appropriately difficult teacher certificate standards that each and every teacher in Nebraska has met up to this point.

Another would replace the retirement Rule of 85 with the Rule of 90 for new school employees and eliminate defined benefit retirement plans for public employees.

Senators seek to defund the Master Teacher Program, which encourages teachers to seek National Board Certification, mentor their colleagues and become leaders in the education field. The Master Teacher Program was put into statute 17 years ago. Nebraska teachers then waited 15 years for the Legislature to find the wherewithal to actually fund the program, and now senators propose not only to take away that funding, but to erase the statutory language from the books.

Senators proposed a bill that will deny a third grader promotion to fourth grade if the student cannot pass a reading test. Also on the docket: a purely punitive proposal to rank the performance of school districts by letter grade, from ‘A’ to ‘F.’

Did I mention that senators want to deny you the right to pay your association dues through payroll deduction?

The Storm is Here

Finally, two bills go hand-in-hand and threaten to defund public schools in tiny chunks and turn tax revenues over to privateers and for-profit schemes. They are especially vexing, considering how taxpayers (and policymakers themselves!) are raising heat about high taxes. Senators will consider using public tax revenues to finance vouchers to private schools, and will also consider allowing charter (read: corporate) schools in Nebraska. My question is this: If we have a \$900 million budget shortfall; if taxpayers, the governor, the Platte Institute and many state senators are concerned about high property taxes; why further defund public schools to finance these schemes and reform fads?

Learn more about each of the Not-So-Magnificent Seven on page 11 of this issue.

The storm is here – and we will best survive it by standing together against these anti-public school, anti-teacher, anti-Association proposals.

NSEA – with your help – will continue its work to protect your livelihood and the education profession in the face of this tempest.

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"Where Members Always Come First!"

District Settles Lawsuit with OEA

Agreement Provides \$262,000 in Back Pay to ‘Substitutes’

A dispute over the negotiated contract between the Omaha Education Association and the Omaha Public Schools has been settled.

In May, with NSEA’s assistance, the OEA filed a lawsuit in Douglas County District Court alleging that a number of teachers and counselors working for OPS were not being paid according to the negotiated agreement.

The Association believed OPS had misclassified some certificated teachers as “substitute” teachers and, as such, those teachers were not receiving the compensation to which they are entitled.

With the settlement, reached out of court, the school district agreed to provide \$262,000 in back pay for 42 Omaha educators.

“This settlement cures a serious economic injury that has been inflicted on more than three dozen Association members,” said OEA President Bridget Donovan. “The past misclassification of these teachers has now been corrected, they have been made whole, and they will be classified correctly going forward.”

NSEA attorney Scott Norby represented OEA and said the district had hired educators to fill permanent vacancies, and paid them at lesser, substitute rates. The OEA lawsuit pointed out that those hires were performing the same duties as full-time, certificated staff: developing lesson plans, handing out grades, meeting parents



Classified Correctly: Omaha Education Association member Rose Roder displays the check for back pay she received from the Omaha Public Schools’ settlement over misclassification of more than 40 teachers.

and other duties.

“If it walks like a duck, and talks like a duck, then it’s a duck,” Norby told the Omaha World-Herald at the time.

By mid-May, OEA and NSEA leaders and staff had worked for more than four months in an attempt to resolve the issue. That work included requests for information, meetings with district administrators and meetings with the teacher members involved.

The lack of progress caused the OEA to seek relief through the courts. Norby filed a Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief with the Douglas County District Court. An Unfair Labor Practice lawsuit was filed with the Nebraska Commission of Industrial Relations.

Having highly-qualified, certificated teachers teaching and working with students is a top priority of the Association, said Donovan. To ensure the district is able to continue to recruit and retain such teachers, those teachers must be compensated fairly, in accordance with the negotiated agreement.

“This is a significant settlement, both in terms of dollars and the issues resolved. But I want members to know this is just one of many, many issues their Association tackles and resolves on behalf of members during the course of a week, a month or a year. Together, we are better,” said Donovan.

Read Across America Turns 20 in March!

Dr. Seuss Birthday to be Observed Nationwide on March 2

The Cat in the Hat has reached another milestone.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the NEA-founded Read Across America program!

The event celebrates Dr. Seuss creator Theodor Geisel’s birthday and will be held on Thursday, March 2, the 113th anniversary of his birth.

Are you making plans to celebrate adequately? If you need help, the National Education Association has plenty of ideas and materials to make your Read Across America Celebration a success.

Here’s how it works: Read Across America encourages every child in every community to celebrate the love of reading. The program also supports NEA members, parents, caregivers, and children with resources and activities they need to keep reading fun throughout the year.

The event frequently opens a full week of reading events and activities. In order to help your event be a success, NEA has put together a package

of items and ideas online to help you celebrate. For instance:

■ **Get the latest info:** Go to the Read Across America website to find a wide variety of information, including how to create a reading event, activity ideas, downloadable information for parents, as well as the pledge to participate this year! Items and materials are updated frequently, so please check back often.

■ **Celebration day items:** The NEA Read Across America website provides the Read Across America song, oath and poem, as well as NEA’s Declaration of Reading Independence.

■ **Find the poster!** Download and print the 2016 Read Across America Day Poster from the NEA Read Across America website.

■ **Invite the media:** Why not let the world know about your celebration – and the importance of literacy? The NEA Read Across America website has a series of tips, ideas and sample news releases and letters to the editor you can use to get your project noticed by local newspaper, radio stations and television station reporters. Your students will get some coverage and your school district will shine!

For more details, visit the website at:

nea.org/readacross



www.nea.org/readacross



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Stacked & Backed

Circumstances, Solidarity Led Falls City EA to Negotiate Nebraska's First Teaching Contract

Local Strengthened Earlier by 'Stacking' Contracts in Support of Targeted Colleague

An injury to one is an injury to all.

That's a common theme among union activists, and it was no more evident than in the mid-1960s when members of the Falls City Education Association banded together to "stack" their unsigned contracts and back a colleague who had been unjustly targeted by administration.

The FCEA's activism was timely: it strengthened the Association at a time of rapid change in the profession in Nebraska and elsewhere. That solidarity served FCEA members well, as they then secured what became the first professionally negotiated teaching contract in Nebraska.

Paul Weinert was one of three teachers, all now retired, who were instrumental in those contract talks.

"We didn't know we were first. It was nothing we planned," said Weinert, who served as Falls City Education Association president in the pivotal 1967-68 school year.

"Our association was tight enough that we stuck together," he said. "The fact that we were first was because we had a strong association."

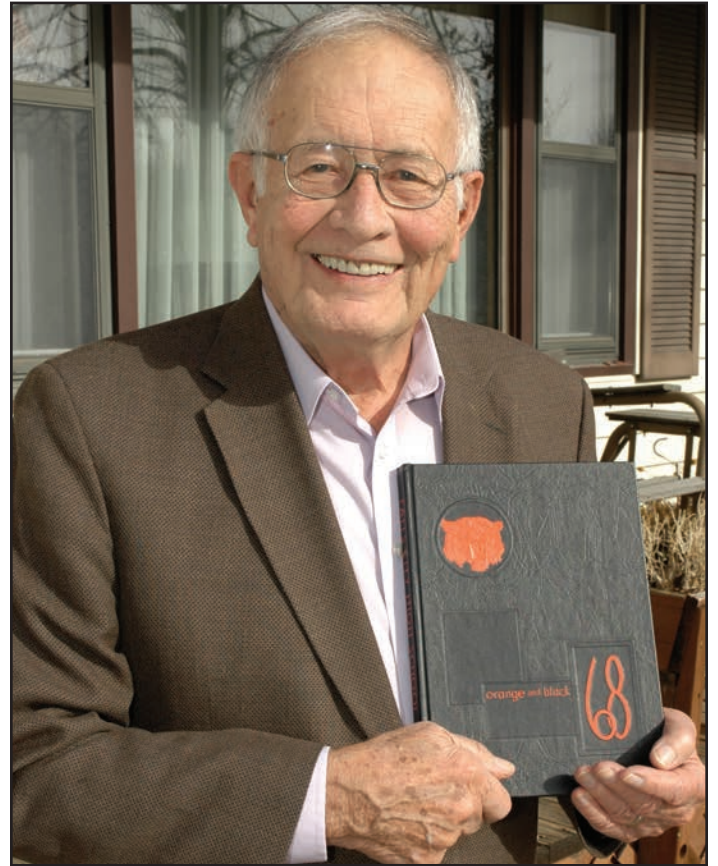
Working alongside Weinert were Larry Godwin and Pete Christensen. Weinert has lived in Falls City for nearly all his 86 years, and is an ordained Methodist minister, a former city councilman and former mayor of Falls City. Godwin closed out his teaching career in Falls City and lives in a local retirement home. Christensen left Falls City High School for Educational Service Unit No. 3, and then administrative positions in Oregon, where he lives today.

A Hardship for Some

Much happened in the Nebraska Legislature in 1967 to bring teaching to true professional status.

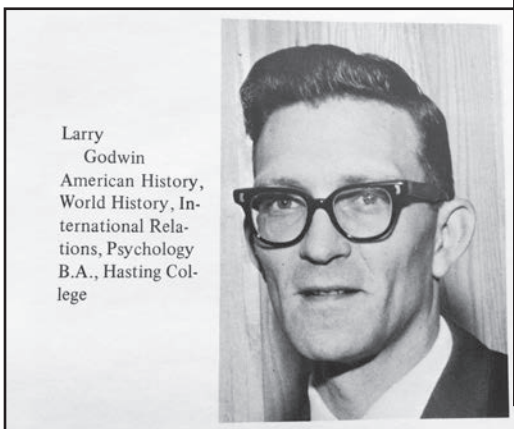
Senators passed LB457, which formally recognized teaching as a profession. It also created the Professional Practices Commission, which monitors the profession and recommends sanctions on teaching certificates for educators who break laws or rules of conduct.

LB595 gave K-12 teachers a three-year probationary period, after which they are protected against unwarranted and unjustified dismissal through a hearing process. In turn, educators must show evidence of professional growth.

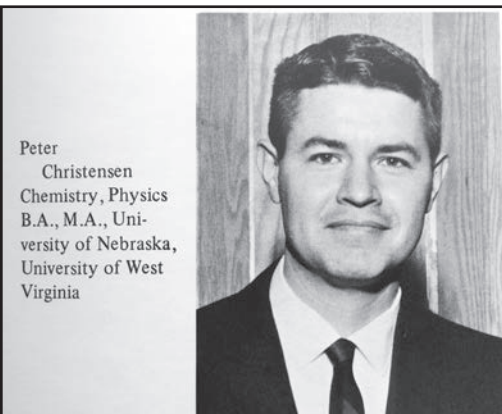


A Pivotal Year: Former Falls City Education Association member and leader Paul Weinert said a strong association led to the first professionally negotiated teaching contract in Nebraska.

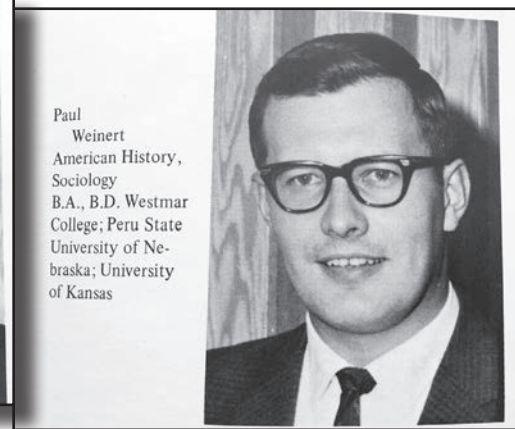
Finally, LB485 – allowing educators to negotiate salary and benefits – was approved near the end of the 1967 session. The timing was perfect for members in Falls City, who entered the final year of a three-year, unstructured contract in the fall of 1967. Weinert noted that before LB485, school boards were not required to negotiate



Larry Godwin
American History, World History, International Relations, Psychology
B.A., Hasting College



Peter Christensen
Chemistry, Physics
B.A., M.A., University of Nebraska, University of West Virginia



Paul Weinert
American History, Sociology
B.A., B.D. Westmar College; Peru State University of Nebraska; University of Kansas

or even meet with teachers about contract issues. For instance, when Weinert left the ministry to take the teaching job in his hometown, he leapfrogged the salaries of many veteran teachers.

“There were teachers who had been there 20 years. When I was hired in '63 they gave me more or as much as they were earning,” said Weinert.

The three-year pact provided no raise in the second and third years. By the time the 1967-68 school year began, Weinert said the lack of raises had become a hardship for some.

“Inflation being what it was, we decided there needed to be improvements,” said Weinert. “In that third year, things were just beginning to get organized. We hardly knew what we were doing.”

Stacked, Unsigned

The three-year contract initially gave all teachers the same new raise – Weinert doesn't recall the exact figure – but then froze salaries for remainder of the contract.

All teachers got the increase, with one exception.

A veteran FCEA member had experienced a diabetic reaction while driving through downtown Falls City. Weinert said the man was able to stop his car, got out and staggered. Someone came to his aid, and the teacher asked for orange juice. He quickly recovered.

“But the rumor got around that he was drunk on Main Street,” said Weinert. “He wasn't a drinker at all. He knew it would cause trouble with his health.”

Soon after, school secretaries hand-delivered the new contracts to teachers in every building. Weinert said the man called immediately: his contract did not include a raise.

“They were trying to get rid of him,” said Weinert.

Weinert called a general meeting of the FCEA the following day, and virtually all members attended. He shared what had happened to their colleague. There had been no hearing, no complaint filed.

I asked “What do you think would happen if none of us would sign our contracts?”

Many on the teaching staff were middle aged, and had been in the district for years. Weinert said neither he, nor Godwin or Christensen, thought members would support the plan. “But they did,” said Weinert.

Some members had arrived at the meeting, unsigned contracts in hand.

“They actually stacked their contracts together, unsigned,” he said.

“We agreed that no one would sign the contract until our fellow member was not discriminated against.”

Weinert quickly reported the situation to the superintendent. The

Falls City first to win p.n. agreement

The Falls City Education Association has emerged as Nebraska's first local to report a completed professional negotiations agreement under provisions of LB 485.

Formal recognition has been achieved by several other locals. In these cases, the local associations are current-

ly working out agreement details with school boards.

NSEA Salary and Negotiations Consultant Noel Roberts commented that any district intending to enter into negotiations this year should already be striving to complete its negotiations agreement. This to permit settlement of salaries and other basic

items before contracts are issued.

Through a special bulletin being mailed this week, the NSEA Professional Development and Welfare office is conducting a poll of all affiliated locals. Purpose: to determine the status of professional negotiations in Nebraska schools.

First in Line: The NSEA staff had assisted along the way, and the completion of the contract by the Falls City Education Association was cause for recognition. A small blurb on the front page of the Jan. 5, 1968, edition of *The Education News* – predecessor to *The Voice* – celebrated the contract.

school board met within days, and offered the raise to the teacher.

“Thinking back, it was pretty blooming gutsy, particularly since many of our members were well into their careers and had made Falls City their home,” said Weinert.

But, he said, “it strengthened our local.”

‘Not the Business of Teachers’

That strength came into play in the fall of 1967, as Weinert, Godwin and Christensen began to negotiate a contract for the 1968-69 school year.

With the provisions of LB485 behind them, the trio divided duties. Although he taught social studies and psychology, Godwin was the numbers man; Weinert and Christensen were the spokespersons.

“Pete and I both said that Larry was the brains of the team. He was always doodling and working with numbers,” said Weinert.

Godwin put together a salary schedule – something that Weinert pointed out has now become standard practice.

Weinert secured a spot on the school board agenda, and told the board that, based on LB485, FCEA members wished to discuss a contract for the following year.

That drew the ire of one board member who “ripped into us and said it was the public's business, and not the business of teachers” to determine salaries. Fortunately, several board members asked to hear the FCEA's proposal.

Weinert said Godwin shared the salary schedule, which included a five percent increase in every direction. The proposal had every faculty member on the schedule, and included a total cost.

The board took the request under advisement, and at a later meeting the board agreed to the schedule was fair – with one change: the board agreed to the base but lowered the step increases to four percent.

“We agreed,” he said. “It was so easy it would make you cry.”

Easy, perhaps. Gutsy, as well.

Historic, for certain.

EHA Will Offer One-Time ‘Buy-Up’ Option

The Educators Health Alliance has announced a one-time special ‘buy up’ option for the 2017-18 school year allowing a lowering of the plan deductible.

The Executive Committee of the EHA Board of Directors approved this option, which creates two more deductibles for the 2017-18 plan year. The new offering of the \$750 PPO and \$1,000 PPO will allow school districts and their employees more options to lower their rate increase by choosing to move up the deductible

amount.

The committee's action provides an exception to the current restriction on lowering deductibles.

The EHA recognized the new PPO deductibles replaced the eliminated 2016 options. Since the renewal, the EHA has received feedback in some interest for individual districts to have the option of lowering deductibles.

The action, which applies to all groups regardless of the current plan deductible

option, allows for the lowering of the deductible by one level for the 2017-18 year. After 2017-18 the plan will reinstate the restriction on lowering deductibles in order to avoid adverse selection.

Any changes to your deductible will begin Sept. 1, 2017, and changes must be made to Blue Cross Blue Shield before the start of a new contract year.

If you have any questions please contact Greg Long at 402-440-9633, or at:

greg@ehaplan.org

Property Tax Truth

State Aid is the Solution

Nebraska School Districts Historically More Frugal than State Government

There is no doubt that Nebraskans want – and need – property tax relief. But the ire aimed at public school spending is misdirected, despite what that vocal chorus of loud voices would have Joe Citizen believe.

The truth is that spending on K-12 public schools in Nebraska is not out of control, especially when compared to state spending.

While state policymakers call for local governments to “reign in” local spending, and, thus, property taxes, NSEA research reveals that over the past 20 years, K-12 public school expenditures and property tax requests have grown at a lesser rate than state government spending.

Cumulatively, over the 20-year-period ending in 2015-16 (the most recent date for which figures are available), state government spending rose by an average of 4.31 percent per year. During the same time, total general fund spending on K-12 schools in Nebraska rose by 4.15 percent.

Most surprising: property tax revenue for K-12 schools rose by just 3.82 percent per year, on average, during that period.

Policymakers who seek to “grow Nebraska” should be comforted in that fact that some of that K-12 spending growth can be attributed to student numbers. The public school student population in Nebraska grew 11.1 percent from 1999-00 (the earliest figures available on the Nebraska Department of Education website) to 2016-17. In raw numbers, K-12 student numbers ballooned by 31,883 students, from 286,970 to 318,853.

At 22 students per classroom, that’s nearly 1,500 new classrooms filled with new students who need to be taught every day.

“Those who have served on school boards, those who have attended school board meetings on a regular basis know that elected school officials are thrifty stewards of property and other tax revenue dollars,” said NSEA President Nancy Fulton.

“The problem driving the rise in property taxes is that the state is not doing its share,” said Fulton.

‘Bottom Drops Out’

How serious is the lack of state funding?

The problem is perhaps no more clear than in Broken Bow, where school district leaders had to contend with a \$658,000 loss of state aid from last year to this year. The Board of Education consulted with a

Dana F. Cole Co. accountant who, during a September budget meeting, told the board that “the big change is you’re having to ask for more property tax because state aid has gone down.”

In Holdrege, Supt. Todd Hillyard told citizens at a budget hearing that the average annual General Fund budget increase over the past 10 years was 1.7 percent. Eighty-seven percent of the district revenue comes from local sources, he said. The state supplies just 8 percent.

The tiny Sterling Public School District handled an \$830,000 loss in state aid over the past two years. At Superior, the headline read ‘For Superior schools, bottom drops out of state aid bucket’ to characterize a drop in state aid from more than \$1 million two years ago to about \$2,500 for the current year.

Clear Correlation

Nebraska has a history of sitting at, or near, the bottom of rankings for state aid to public schools. The U.S. Census Bureau report on Public Education Finances for 2014 (the latest figures available) show Nebraska ranked ahead of only South Dakota in state aid to K-12 schools. Nebraska has been at or near that level of support for more than 50 years.

NSEA Director of Research Larry Scherer said there is a clear correlation between state aid investment and property tax rates.

“When state aid does not keep up, property taxes go up that much faster to make up the difference,” said Scherer, who collected the data.

For instance, he said, in 1999-2000, state aid declined 1 percent, and property taxes went up 6 percent. In 2003-04, state aid dropped 3.2 percent, and property tax collections rose 11.29 percent.

“The correlation is clear,” said Fulton. “The solution is evident. If the state hopes to lower property taxes, state aid is the answer.”

Measured, Deliberate

Individual school districts, facing individual circumstances, may vary – sometimes wildly – from year to year. But by and large, school spending is measured and deliberate, controlled. Consider these reports gleaned from media sources across the state earlier this school year:

- **Ainsworth:** The general fund request at for 2016-17 was \$9.36 million – an increase of just \$60,000 over the previous year, an increase of less than one-tenth of one percent.
- **Albion:** Property tax asking increased 1.9 percent.
- **Arapahoe:** The budget was cut by \$105,700, or a cut of about 2.6 percent.
- **Aurora:** Increased budget expenditures by 2.4 percent.
- **Bellevue:** Up about 2 percent.
- **Bennington:** Up 9.7 percent – enrollment is up 12.75 percent.
- **Benkleman:** Up 1.8 percent; state aid will be \$111.

20 Years of Truth

	All K-12 Tax Rcpt Growth	Spend Growth K-12 School	State Govt.
96-97	-2.95%	3.02%	5.30%
97-98	1.26%	2.79%	4.20%
98-99	-5.39%	4.63%	5.00%
99-00	2.41%	5.23%	12.60%
00-01	5.82%	5.71%	4.30%
01-02	5.78%	5.91%	5.80%
02-03	4.69%	4.26%	6.00%
03-04	11.29%	3.21%	0.60%
04-05	4.58%	2.30%	1.30%
05-06	3.44%	5.92%	3.90%
06-07	5.83%	6.43%	7.80%
07-08	4.52%	5.56%	7.00%
08-09	7.72%	5.57%	3.90%
09-10	2.87%	0.50%	5.30%
10-11	5.13%	-0.69%	-4.50%
11-12	4.52%	8.09%	2.40%
12-13	2.23%	3.40%	1.90%
13-14	5.85%	4.06%	4.70%
14-15	5.82%	3.82%	5.70%
15-16	2.14%	3.57%	4.00%
AAG*:	3.82%	4.15%	4.31%

*These numbers reflect Average Annual Growth over the 20 years.

20-Year Historical Growth of Property Taxes, State Aid and General Fund

	State	All Neb. Districts	Ainsworth	Fremont	Waverly	Lincoln	Southern Valley	Sidney	Bellevue	Mullen	Pawnee City
Property Tax Receipts	NA	3.82%	4.77%	2.67%	4.03%	2.80%	4.43%	3.86%	5.85%	3.47%	5.76%
State Aid Receipts	NA	4.36%	-13.01%	5.39%	-3.72%	7.45%	-21.36%	2.89%	3.69%	-100%	1.84%
Total General Fund Expenditures	4.31%	4.15%	3.67%	4.26%	3.90%	4.23%	2.68%	3.73%	3.94%	3.46%	4.07%

- **Boone Central:** A 2.9 percent increase in property tax asking.
- **Centennial:** Budget increase of 2.4 percent.
- **Central City:** Increased tax asking of 2.4 percent.
- **Centura:** An increase of \$18,865 on a budget of \$5.3 million.
- **Chase County:** Up \$55,000 on a \$7.28 million budget.
- **David City:** a 2.3 percent increase in property tax asking.
- **Douglas County West:** Up 1.6 percent, even with a 4 percent increase in enrollment.
- **Elkhorn:** Up 9.47 percent; enrollment up more than 7 percent.
- **Elwood:** Total tax asking of \$3.654 million, down about \$132,000 from last year.
- **Grand Island:** Property tax asking is up about 3.8 percent.
- **Hartington-Newcastle:** The tax asking of \$5.11 million is unchanged from last year.
- **Hemingford:** Tax asking increased \$13,000 on an \$8.4 million budget.
- **Hitchcock County:** The general fund budget of \$3.967 million is an increase of \$39,000.
- **Laurel-Concord-Coleridge:** The tax asking stayed at \$6.006 million for the second year.
- **McCook:** A \$200,000 increase in tax asking, about 2.8 percent.
- **Minden:** A \$25,111 decrease in tax asking for 2016-17.
- **Nebraska City:** A General Fund increase of 1.99 percent.
- **Newman Grove:** the local property tax asking decreased by about \$250,000 from the previous year.
- **Ogallala:** A 3.6 percent increase in property tax asking.
- **O'Neill:** A property tax increase of \$200,000, or 2.4 percent.
- **Pierce:** The school board asked for \$2,500 less in property tax than in the previous year.
- **Ralston:** Total budget is up 2.6 percent.
- **Raymond Central:** Property tax request up 1.5 percent.
- **Seward:** Budget request is up 1.89 percent.
- **Sidney:** Total budget increased just 1.2 percent.
- **Southwest:** The \$5.69 million budget is an increase of just \$31,738.
- **Springfield-Platteview:** Up about 3.3 percent.
- **Wauneta-Palisade:** General Fund spending will drop by about \$162,000 to \$3.95 million.
- **West Point-Beemer:** The \$16.3 million budget is up \$82,100, or one-half of one percent.

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Not So Splendid

Legislature Offers Menu of Vouchers, Charters, Rule of 90, Among 'Not-So-Magnificent Seven'

After a testy January start to the 2017 session of the Legislature, state senators began to focus on introduction of new legislation. That focus appears to put teachers and public education on a bumpy course for the next four months.

Proposed bills clearly target funding for K-12 and higher education; teacher certification; collective bargaining; organizing by public sector unions; and more. Seven topics, in particular, are targeted in a series of bills that stand out as bad ideas. With apologies to fans of the western movie genre, you might call them the 'Not-So-Magnificent Seven.'

The seven topics, along with scores of other education-related bills, will cause a long, difficult session for senators, educators and, ultimately, children.

"This will be a long, contentious session," said NSEA President Nancy Fulton. "We really need members to step up this year. Every contact with a senator has the potential to

swing a vote, to make a difference."

The 'Not-So-Magnificent Seven' would:

- Replace the retirement Rule of 85 with the Rule of 90 for new school employees (LB415);

- Essentially allow high school grads to serve as substitute teachers (LB 568, LB650);

- Allow voucher (LB608) and charter school (LB630) schemes into Nebraska;

- Require every third grade student to pass a reading proficiency test before advancing to fourth grade (LB568);

- Eliminate the only state-funded program designed to enhance K-12 teacher professionalism (LB214);

- Eliminate payroll dues deduction for Association membership for teachers, police and firefighters (LB503); and

- Grade K-12 schools on a 'A' to 'F' basis.

While NSEA will work hard to make certain none of these bills pass, it will take the



Testimonials: Standing up for the Master Teacher Act in front of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee in January were, from left, Ralston's Tom Earhart and Jamie Honke, and Lincoln's Nila Jacobsen.

assistance of every member, in every corner of the state, to turn back these bad ideas.

Master Teacher Program at Risk

Among the top items on the List of Bad Ideas is elimination of the Master Teacher Program, the lone state-funded program to enhance teacher skills and knowledge.

The governor's proposed budget package includes an immediate cut of all program funds, \$470,000 in both this fiscal year and next. In addition, Hastings Sen. Steve Halloran has proposed LB214, complete elimination of the statutory language supporting the Master Teacher Act.

Ralston Spanish teacher Jamie Honke told the Legislature's Appropriations Committee that the program promotes excellence.

"This investment in educators affects every student they teach, every young person they mentor, and every new teacher who follows their example and says to themselves, 'that is the kind of teacher I want to be,'" she said.

Lincoln Spanish teacher Nila Jacobsen said Nebraska must systematically increase the quality of the state's teaching force if policymakers wish to prepare students for the work world.

"Accomplished teaching must be the norm, not the exception," she said. "The Master Teacher Program is a pathway for Nebraska educators to maximize their students' positive outcomes as they gain new skills."

Cuts to Breakfast Program

Senators would lengthen the probationary status for community college teachers from two to three years. NSEA opposes that bill, LB124. NSEA also reviewed:

- **Breakfast Funding:** LB22, the governor's deficit appropriations bill, would reduce funding for school breakfast programs by four percent. NSEA opposes.

- **Retirement Plans Merger:** LB548 would merge the Omaha retirement plan with the state retirement plan that serves the remainder of Nebraska school employees. NSEA opposes the merger, until the Omaha plan is in a stronger position.

- **State Aid Certification:** LB119 would push the formal certification of state from the current March 1 date to June 1. Delaying certification would cause problems elsewhere.

For instance, state statute dictates that school districts must make staffing decisions by April 15 each year. To make such decisions without final state aid numbers would be impossible.

A delay in certification would also cause havoc with a state-mandated bargaining schedule that has operated smoothly for the past four years. Statute requires bargaining to be complete 25 days after state aid is certified, but appeals to the Commission of Industrial Relations must be completed by Sept. 15. Delaying certification to June 1 would allow bargaining to extend until June 26, and would provide about 10 weeks for the CIR

to receive a petition to resolve an unsettled collective bargaining dispute. Very few, if any, CIR wage cases have been resolved in that short of a time frame.

NSEA proposes an April 1 date, or delaying changes to the state aid formula until next session. At the very least, NSEA urges an interim study that would take into account the schedules of appropriations, school budgeting and collective bargaining.

Stay in Touch Via Texts!

It's become very easy to be among the 'first to know' when a legislative issue needs your support or opposition. NSEA's texting program provides instant information on state and federal issues of interest to educators.

NSEA Director of Communications Karen Kilgarin said "We will not bombard members with text messages. But we do want members to receive timely, useful updates."

With the tenor of bills introduced in the Legislature, won't you join NSEA's text message service? To do so, provide the requested information at:

<http://www.nsea.org/text>



'17 Nebraska Legislature

Agent of Change

NSEA's Next Executive Director Says Education is the Engine that Drives Economic Growth

Shortly after Maddie Fennell accepted the offer to become executive director of the NSEA, she made a deal with herself.

"I promised myself that the last thing I do – my last touch point as a professional – will be back in a classroom, back in a school," she said. "Teaching energizes the rest of the work that I do."



Fennell

She has one caveat: "I want to go back to a system that is better than the system as it is currently."

By all accounts, Fennell possesses the qualities needed to challenge the education system status quo. Those asked about her qualifications said she is empowering, courageous, tireless and charismatic. Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute called her "a force of nature."

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said: "I sort of think Maddie walks on water."

Fennell's resume is impressive.

She taught 1st, 4th and 6th grades, and served as a literacy coach, working at Conestoga, Druid Hill, Skinner, Franklin and Miller Park elementary schools in Omaha. Always active in her Association, she eventually served as president of the Omaha Education Association.

She was Nebraska's 2007 Teacher of the Year, and later acquired National Board certification. From 2013-2015 she held dual roles as a Literacy Coach for the Omaha Public Schools and as a Teaching Ambassador Fellow for the U.S. Department of Education. In September 2016 she began a full-time position as a Teacher Leader in Residence in the office of the U.S. Secretary of Education, promoting the importance of teacher leadership. She serves as secretary of the board of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year.

In 2010, Fennell was hand-picked by then-NEA President Dennis Van Roekel to chair NEA's Commission of Effective Teachers and Teaching. Their report, *Transforming Teaching: Connecting Professional Responsibility with Student Learning*, was an "outside the box" approach to reforming the education profession.

With those accomplishments, and more, behind her, Fennell on March 1 becomes the 14th executive director of the NSEA.

Fennell began work in mid-January with Executive Director Dr. Craig R. Christiansen. Last year, Christiansen announced plans to leave effective at the end of February and return to his first



The Heart of it All: Maddie Fennell makes no apologies about the fact that all she does in education is to the benefit of children.

love: research and teaching at the university level.

An 'Engine for Growth'

"I never would have been a success without first being a member of the NSEA," said Fennell.

She was a student member at Creighton University – she was twice elected to chair the NEA and NSEA Student Program – before she began to student teach with Omaha Education Association leader Anne Palmesano as her cooperating teacher.

"When I needed to find a job, it was Anne who helped me make those connections. When I was struggling, it was Anne and then my colleagues, both at my school, Conestoga Elementary, and those I'd met across the state and across the country – who reached out a hand and helped me be successful," said Fennell.

Fennell wants every Nebraska teacher to experience that same sense of Association-driven growth.

"I know that we as an Association can do that. It's a value proposition that no one can take away from us," she said. "I want the teacher next door to me to be successful, not only because I'm working with her, but because I'm either giving her my kids or I'm getting kids from her," said Fennell.

Student success is the major vehicle for economic growth in Nebraska. Successful teachers are the engine for that vehicle.

"NSEA is the primary delivery system for meeting teacher needs and for making sure that teachers are ready and have all the skills, knowledge and dispositions they need to be successful in the classroom," she said. "That will allow kids to succeed and our economy to grow."

Bargaining, however, will remain the Association's bread and butter.

"We will always be the people who watch out for the basics of making sure that 'I can be taking care of students,

"Who is going to say that we as an Association don't have the right to make each other better, that we can't be the quality control guardians of our own profession?"

**Maddie Fennell,
NSEA's 14th Executive Director**

but I can still take care of my own family, that I'm getting both the resources as an individual and the working conditions needed to be successful," she said.

Rural/Urban Perspective

The varied experiences on her resume give Fennell a broad knowledge of the education universe. So, too, does her personal life.

She has spent most of her life in Omaha, but her formative teenage years were spent in North Platte, where her father worked for Union Pacific Railroad.

"Being able to be in a small community where everybody knows everybody and people take care of each other was important for me," she said. "I have a real appreciation for western Nebraska."

She frequently used that unique rural/urban perspective while working on policy at the U.S. Department of Education.

"I would tell them 'you can't just look at what it's going to look like in a large urban area. I want to know what this is going to look like in Gordon, Nebraska, where my dad was born. What is this going to look like in our most remote school districts? In Cherry County, which is bigger than some states?'"

Politically, Fennell said she has "intentionally put a foot in both camps," giving her broad perspective on policy issues.

She has worked for the left side of the aisle at the U.S. Department of Education and has worked to understand the perspective of conservatives like Hess, director of Education Policy at the American Enterprise Institute. She encouraged Hess to follow his 2013 book *Cage-Busting Leadership* with a book about teaching. Fennell eventually critiqued a draft of *The Cage-Busting Teacher*, written by Hess and published in 2015.

"I believe that we need to build bridges across our commonality with people, not burn them over differences," she said. "You never know when the person you're arguing with today could be your greatest ally tomorrow."

That willingness to see all sides of an issue will be an asset as NSEA stands against reform fads and trends.

"While we in Nebraska pay attention to national trends, we're not 'jump on board and let's see what happens' kind of people. We make reasoned decisions that are in alignment with our values and what we think is best for kids," she said.

For instance, Fennell is often asked why Nebraska does not have charter schools.

"The fact is that we have all kinds of choice in our state. Charter schools create a space for only certain kids. I'm not interested in

"She combines a classroom teacher's practicality, a visionary streak, a get-it-done competence, and a knack for working with people from across the spectrum. She's a force of nature."

**Frederick M. Hess,
Director of Education
Policy Studies,
American Enterprise Institute**

"Maddie is well-organized and knows how to bring people together for the common good of teaching and learning. She is articulate, very personable and knows how to empower others to get things done."

**Lisa A. Utterback
Executive Director,
Elementary School
Support and Supervision, OPS**

"It is safe to say that teachers, principals and students are at the heart of everything she does."

**Ruthanne Buck, Senior Advisor,
U.S. Secretary of Education**

"She has an incredible knowledge about the profession, and has a very good perspective on how to best serve kids with very different needs and circumstances."

**Dennis Van Roekel
NEA President, 2008-14**

creating a system that is only going to work for certain kids. I want to create a system that is going to work for every kid," she said.

Bread, Butter Issue

Fennell will begin her new work by



At the White House: Fennell poses with President George Bush and his wife Laura during her visit to the White House as Nebraska's 2007 Teacher of the Year.

listening.

"I've been on the NSEA Board of Directors, so I've had a finger on the pulse of what's going on in the state. But I want to get a little deeper in my listening as to what we're doing and doing well, what we're doing but could be doing better, and what we're not doing but we need to be doing to meet the needs of our kids and our members."

She'll always put kids first. She didn't become a teacher just to become a member of the union.

"I came into the union because I wanted to be a great teacher. I think if the union focuses on what is in the best interest of our kids, 99 percent of the time that's what's in the best interest of our teachers. Rarely do those things not coalesce," she said.

She vows to be a student-centered Association leader who recognizes that the classrooms that kids learn in are the classrooms teachers work in.

"That environment has to be conducive for both teachers and students," she said.

Fennell said she is committed to the two-year strategic planning process underway at NSEA.

"I'm energized by the work that is coming out of strategic planning," she said. "Yes, we need to keep the bread and butter issues of the benefits and bargaining, but we also have to be ready to expand our value proposition so that we can meet the needs of more members."

She hopes to see the Association become even more nimble and proactive in response to rapidly changing political situations.

The Greater Good

NSEA's mission statement includes these words: "Our vision is a great public education for every student."

Every member should know those words, she said.

"I want them to know what they signed on for, that the personal, family resources that they have committed to the NSEA – I want them to feel that they get those resources back tenfold, but that it's also driving a greater good, which is the vision of the NSEA," she said.

She also wants members to understand she is an educator first, and may be the first teacher to step directly from the classroom to the executive director's office.

"I've had varied experience along the route, but I have maintained my job as a teacher with OPS. I'm very proud of that fact," she said. "Choosing a classroom teacher as Executive Director shows how Nebraska values its educators."



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NSEA will Assist with PRAXIS Prep

\$109,800 Grant to Aid Educator Rising Chapters, Help Teachers-to-Be

A grant to NSEA for \$109,800 will soon help many Nebraska teachers-to-be reach their dream of leading a classroom.

The National Education Association's Great Public Schools Fund grant will be used to encourage high school students, particularly students of color, to consider becoming teachers. The grant will also fund stipends for NSEA members to provide college students with seminars and tutoring to assist them in passing the Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators Test.

The Praxis, as it is commonly called, is designed to determine whether candidates for education programs can demonstrate "basic skills competency" in reading, writing and mathematics. For a candidate to be admitted to a Nebraska teacher preparation program, he or she must first pass the Praxis basic skills tests.

"Fewer and fewer students are choosing to become teachers," said NSEA President Nancy Fulton. "There has been a 20 percent drop in the number of students enrolled in Nebraska colleges of education over the past 5 years and a 50 percent drop over the past dozen years. This grant will significantly help to reverse that trend by recruiting, mentoring and engaging a diverse faculty to meet the needs of our diverse students."

NSEA plans to work with local affiliates and other partners to organize a statewide cadre of mentors for the Praxis Mentoring Program; to build a robust mentoring program; to recruit college students to the program; and to develop an online course with a facilitated, ongoing edCommunities group.

The NEA Great Public Schools Fund grant will finance a three-part approach.

- It will fund stipends for NSEA teacher members to lead an overview course on the Praxis to interested college and university students at six locations: state colleges at Wayne, Peru and Chadron; at Kearney; at Lincoln; and in the Omaha metro area.
- It will pay NSEA teacher members to provide one-on-one or small group mentoring to teachers-to-be in the reading, writing and math skills needed to pass the Praxis.
- It will provide a stipend to NSEA members who organize a

local chapter of Educators Rising, an organization for high school students considering teaching as a career. The grant will also provide funding for programming needs at the local chapters. The goal is to connect high school students with teacher education programs at Nebraska's colleges and universities.

All teachers-to-be may participate. Fulton said there will be a strong focus on recruitment of all ethnic minority students because the growing number of children of color in Nebraska schools have few role models of color leading classrooms. In most cases, the number of ethnic minority teachers in Nebraska classrooms fall far short of the number of ethnic minority students in the state's public schools.

"This is a 'demographic mismatch' that matters," said Fulton. "Students of color need teachers who not only set rigorous standards, but teachers who can provide models of professional success. Teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing the academic achievement of students of similar backgrounds."

The goal is to offer the first round of Praxis study seminars and tutoring in early to Spring 2017.

NSEA had applied for a grant of more than \$457,000 over three years. NSEA will apply again for the second and third year of the program to be funded.

NSEA members interested in serving as a mentor in the Praxis study program should contact NSEA Organizational Specialist Mike Wiesen at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

mike.wiesen@nsea.org

Members interested in sponsoring a local Educators Rising Chapter in their school district should call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

This project is made possible by a grant from the National Education Association's Great Public Schools Grant Fund. GPS Fund Grants are awarded to help enhance the quality of public education by developing, implementing and leading an agenda that engages NEA members and allies in work that emphasizes student-centered success through union led efforts.

"This is a 'demographic mismatch' that matters. Students of color need teachers who not only set rigorous standards, but teachers who can provide models of professional success. Teachers of color have demonstrated success in increasing the academic achievement of students of similar backgrounds."

***— Nancy Fulton,
NSEA President***

Bullying Rates said Higher for Kids with Disabilities

Schools Urged to Refocus Efforts, Help Children Develop Social Skills

More than 22 percent of children ages 12-18 say they have been bullied in school within the last month; a significant portion of those children have disabilities. However, little research exists on how bullying rates for individual children change over time.

Now, a University of Missouri researcher and bullying expert has determined that children with disabilities are victimized by bullying at a much higher rate over time than their peers without disabilities. The study also revealed that this discrepancy in victimization and bullying perpetration rates remains consistent as children age.

Chad Rose, assistant professor of special education at MU, says this indicates that children with disabilities are not developing adequate social skills to combat bullying as they mature.

Schools, he suggested, need to further develop these programs by tailoring social development goals for each student to ensure they are

learning the social skills that will help them prevent bullying from occurring. Prior research has shown that children with disabilities, when bullied, may react aggressively when they lack appropriate response skills. Teaching these students how to communicate more effectively with their peers and with teachers can help them react to bullying in more positive ways, as well as prevent it from occurring at all.

Over three years, more than 6,500 children from grades 3-12 were surveyed about their experiences with bullying; 16 percent of the children surveyed had disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, emotional disabilities and autism disorders. Rose and Nicholas Gage, an assistant professor from the University of Florida, found that bullying rates across the board peaked in third grade, were reduced drastically in middle school and then rose again during high school. However, while mirroring this trend, bullying rates for children with disabilities remained consistently higher than those without disabilities.

The study, "Exploring the Involvement of Bullying Among Students With Disabilities Over Time," was published in *Exceptional Children*.

All Donors Could Share Holli's Thank-You Card

Pink Jacket, New Shirts Make a Difference for Child

Holli's letter of thanks was addressed to the NSEA Children's Fund.

In reality, it could have been addressed to any and all of the hundreds of donors who give to the fund each year. It might have been sent, for instance to each one of the members of the Papillion-LaVista Education Association, which held a Jeans Day late last year and collected a whopping \$3,821 for the Children's Fund. Each of those members helped Holli, and other students like Holli, get a new start in school.

Holli's letter of thanks went like this:

"Thank you for letting me pick the clothes I wanted. I loved the Monster High Shirt and the Little Mermaid shirt and the shorts and the pants but what I like the most is the pink jacket."

She signed the hand-printed letter with her name, encircled with a giant heart and a pencil drawing of herself.

A young brother and sister were preparing for their school's Honors Assembly

when their NSEA member-teacher determined that the pair needed new clothing. Old, worn hand-me-downs needed replacements.

For more than 20 years, the Children's Fund has helped hundreds of Nebraska children in need each year. But in recent years, the fund has had trouble keeping up with escalating needs.

In 2015-16, for instance, the Fund sent out about \$3,200 more than it realized through donations.

To put the fund on sound footing, NSEA has launched a drive to raise \$150,000 by October 2017, the 150th anniversary of NSEA's founding. The campaign surpassed \$41,500 in mid-January.

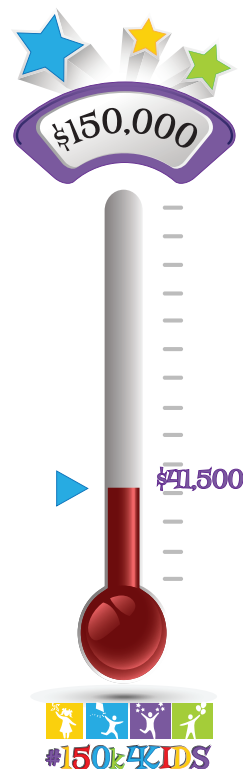
Local associations are encouraged to collect change; host a jeans day fundraiser as they did at Papillion-LaVista; or consider other options. Individual members may also donate at any time. All donations are tax deductible.

To make giving easier, the Children's Fund now accepts gifts through PayPal. Find the PayPal link at:

nsea.org/childrensfund

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

sally.bodtke@nsea.org



'Tag-Teamed' by Parents, Teacher Needed Advice

NSEA Organizational Specialists Give Classroom Teachers an Edge

As a teacher, you can't always know when or why difficulties might arise.

In some settings, trouble might come from a parent – or a several parents.

Consider this request for advice that recently came through NSEA's website from an NSEA member:

"I need to speak with my rep about two of my students' parents and report that these parents have harassed and scrutinized me since the first day of school five weeks ago. I get emails, texts, and phone calls daily. I have documented everything since the beginning. Both of these parents have accused the district of abusing their children. Today, one of the parents threatened to sue my principal. I do not feel comfortable working with my two students under these threats."

"I want to make it clear that my administration is supporting me and they, too, have been targeted. The situation has escalated with no signs of resolution. My administration and I have spent countless hours in discussions with these parents and we cannot make them happy. We have tried in vain to do as they ask/demand but they both look for ways to attack us."

These two parents joined forces earlier in the school year and I feel 'tag-teamed.'"

When it comes to questions about dealing with parents, dealing with classroom management, working with administration or other issues that can make your school year operate more smoothly, call NSEA.

As your professional Association, NSEA has 18 field representatives, called organizational specialists, stationed around the state with teaching expertise, knowledge of Nebraska Department of Education rules and regulations, and an understanding of your school district.

As they did with this particular teacher, NSEA's organizational specialists can assist you in diffusing difficult situations, offering solutions and getting you back to what you do best: teach.

Whatever your question about your employment issues, classroom issues, bargaining situations or more, know that you can contact your NSEA organizational specialist in complete confidentiality. Call your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047,

or send your question through the 'Contact Us' feature of the NSEA website at:

www.nsea.org

You will draw your answer from years of experience and expertise — expertise that gives you "The NSEA Edge."



Don't Give up on Parents!

Your Persistence will Overcome Their Reluctance, Tears

By Kristi Bundy

2014 Nebraska Teacher of the Year

Parent involvement in their child's education has many benefits, from fewer behavioral problems to better academic performance. Research also shows that parental involvement is linked to students finishing high school. With this in mind, I encourage teachers to refuse to give up on parents. I have several examples of where my persistent, loving patience with parents truly paid dividends!

I teach in a middle school with approximately 240 students in grades 6-8. We hold a student-led parent conference during the first and third quarters. Parents sign up online. I monitor the signup alongside my students, and I let them know to remind parents to schedule a conference time. I follow up with an email, then a text, and finally with a call to parents to see if I can help them sign up, if needed. More often than not, parents will get back to me.

However, it is well worth the effort to NEVER give up on those who don't respond.

Several years ago I had a nonresponsive parent. I had coached her older daughter in high school. I reached out to the daughter and asked her to have her mother call me so I might share good news about her brother. The mother reluctantly made contact, and we met after school on a non-conference day. I was completely moved and had an "a-ha!" understanding of why some parents avoid conferences.



Bundy

This mother literally cried at the conference. She had attended school in my building, and her experience was far from positive. She felt "sick to her stomach" just entering the building. She also told me, with tears streaming down her face, that she usually had only bad reports about her son, and was just so proud to hear such a GREAT report. As with most teachers, my personal experience as a student during my years in school was pretty positive. I didn't realize the anxiety that some parents encounter by simply stepping into a school building.

Earlier this year I had a parent facing major car problems. She asked if we could wait to schedule a conference until her

vehicle situation was solved. Once again, it was an amazing conference, held before school.

Another parent this year did not respond despite my repeated efforts. I asked my student if he would like to take his portfolio home to show his mom, or if he wanted me to keep trying to establish contact. He said he didn't care, as his mom would not come. That made me even more determined. I texted mom again, even mentioning that her son didn't think she would come. But I told her son that I was certain if it worked into her schedule, she would show up.

Surprisingly, the mother replied, and she came. When I told her son she was coming, he was so happy he beamed! Yet when his mom arrived, he acted like he didn't really care. When I walked mother out to the door, I told her that I know he didn't act like it, but I had strong evidence that he was extremely happy and pleased that she had made the effort. Suddenly, she was beaming! She was so happy, and THAT made my week.

So don't give up on parents. The academic success of our students relies on parental involvement. And, sometimes, our parents need us to remind them how incredibly valuable they are!

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Save With Susan

If you're a romantic at heart, you can save some money on a thoughtful Valentine's Day gift through NEA Click & Save, the online discount buying service for NEA members.



Estes

Check out these Click & Save featured "Buy-lights" for February:

■ **PerfumeWorldwide.com:** Offers unbeatable prices on name-brand perfumes, colognes, hair care products, cosmetics, and more.

■ **ElizabethArden.com:** Get ready for spring with top-quality beauty and anti-aging products; plus, free shipping on orders of \$59 or more.

■ **SpaWeek.com:** Save on spa and wellness gift certificates that can be used at more than 8,000 spas and wellness facilities across the U.S., Puerto Rico, and Canada.

■ **Jewelry.com:** Amazing values on new arrivals and sale items ranging from everyday basics to couture.

■ **Reebok.com:** Save big on Outlet merchandise, and get free shipping on orders of \$49 or more.

■ **Click & Save Electronics Store:** Find everything you need to support your fitness goals: digital scales, fitness trackers, smart phones, and more!

Be sure to check Click & Save often for unadvertised, limited time offers, including discount dining certificates from Restaurant.com.

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*Susan Estes is Nebraska's
NEA Member Benefits representative*

The No. 1 Way Educators Can Stay Healthy

Follow These Tips to Foster Healthy Habits

By NEA Member Benefits

Schools are a breeding ground for stomach flu, colds, viruses and other bugs, especially during the cold winter months when students (and educators) spend most of their time inside.

Since children share books, computers, pens and pencils as they do schoolwork, there's a good chance they're also sharing viral and bacterial illnesses.

The good news: Navigating the winter season doesn't have to mean dealing with colds and flu. Sure, sickness can spread like wildfire throughout a school, but healthy habits can, too. In fact, Lysol offers a program with extensive course materials to keep students, and you, healthy.

Check out the Lysol program. Then, follow these tips to incorporate healthy habits in the classroom — and stave off illness:

1. Remember your ABCs. Regardless of the grade you teach, it's never too late to re-establish the importance of singing your ABCs, at least while washing your hands.

"Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs," says Joseph Rubino, director of Microbiology at RB, the makers of Lysol. Health authorities recommend washing your hands with soap and running water for the amount of time it takes to sing the ABCs twice.

2. Clean up. Germs are hiding where you least expect them. Playground equipment, desks, book bags, iPads and lockers are common culprits. According to Environmental Health Services in Minnesota, students, as do we all, carry 1,500 germs on each square centimeter of our hands. A

faucet has 229,000 germs per square inch — many of which land on our hands. The antidote, of course, is keeping things clean.

"Since children can touch and retouch up to 300 surfaces in 30 minutes, it is important to disinfect the most commonly touched areas to help prevent the spread of illness," says Rubino, who advises keeping a container of disinfecting wipes handy.

3. Get sanitized. With jam-packed class schedules, it can be tough to get students to a washbasin. When kids are late to the lunchroom, racing to beat the bell before class or on a field trip, hand washing often falls in priority. The good news: When used correctly, studies show alcohol-based hand sanitizers are the next best way to kill germs. Experts recommend keeping hand sanitizers in high-traffic zones, and reminding students to keep their hands to themselves.

4. Keep moving. "Physical activity improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles and increases self-esteem," says Rubino. "It also reduces stress." Encourage students to be active for at least one hour each day, whether that means walking home from school, playing catch or swimming in the pool. You can incorporate regular fitness breaks into your class schedule. Take 10 minutes and ask students to get out of their seats and stretch, or play a quick game of dodge ball.

5. Eat colorfully. Color is an indicator of disease-fighting nutrients, so it's important to ensure kids get a rainbow of color on their plates. "Helping students grow an organic garden puts them knee deep in understanding that they should be eating whole foods from the ground," says Rubino. Not only are fruits and vegetables fabulous snacks, they also offer a vehicle for students to get the nutrients they need to boost immunity.

Give the Gift of College

Instead of Toys or Video Games, Open a 529 College Savings Plan

By Rivan V. Stinson

Looking for a baby gift that keeps on giving? Gift of College, an online registry for 529 plans and student loan accounts, lets you contribute to a child's college education with gift cards for 529 college savings plans. Find the cards at Toys "R" Us and Babies "R" Us stores in amounts ranging from \$25 to \$500, plus a service fee, or buy them online for amounts up to \$300.

Parents create a profile with Gift of College and redeem the card by linking it to an existing 529 plan. If the child doesn't have one,

the site prompts parents to start one from a number of state plans available. Use a similar setup to help pay off student loans.

If you've got unused or unwanted gift cards from the holidays, swap them on the site for a Gift of College e-card. The exchange accepts cards from more than 200 retailers and restaurants; you keep as much as 85 percent of the value. For example, you could recently swap a \$100 Nordstrom gift card for an \$80 Gift of College e-card.

LEAF College Savings also offers gift cards for 529 plans and follows a similar redemption process.

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NEH Grant Program Targets Nebraska

National Humanities Plan Aims at Underserved Areas

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has announced Creating Humanities Communities, a grant that supports grassroots humanities programs by encouraging partnerships and collaborations between multiple institutions or organizations in a town, county or region.

Nebraska is one of 20 states targeted.

The hope is that relationships built and strengthened by the grant will lead to improvements in humanities infrastructure for years to come. The Endowment is particularly reaching out

to Native American groups and tribal governments with this new grant.

Creating Humanities Communities grants are available only to states and territories designated as "incentive areas." Nebraska is one of the 20 that received the least funding through competitively awarded NEH grants in the previous fiscal year.

Institutions and organizations from incentive areas may apply for matching grants of \$30,000, \$60,000, \$90,000 or \$150,000 over three years. Each \$1 of NEH grant support awarded must be matched by \$1 in non-federal, third-party funds. More information about the application process can be found here:

www.neh.gov/files/grants/creating-humanities-communities-feb-15-2017-edit.pdf

Teachers, Librarians Invited to Host Letter Writing Clinics

Nebraska teachers and librarians are invited to apply for \$300 grants to conduct Letters About Literature Letter Writing Clinics. Funding will introduce students to the Letters about Literature (LAL) contest and letter writing techniques, and allow educators to work with them to select books and craft letters to the authors. Grant funds can be used for items such as instructor honorariums, supplies, marketing, small participation prizes,

etc. Applicants will target their efforts to specific age groups: grades 4-6, grades 7-8, or grades 9-12.

For more details about the grant and application process (due March 30), go to: <http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov/lalwritingclinics>

You may also contact JoAnn McManus, Nebraska Library Commission, at 402-471-4870, 1-800-307-2665, or at: joann.mcmanus@nebraska.gov

The grant opportunity is sponsored by the Nebraska Center for the Book and Nebraska Library Commission, and supported by Humanities Nebraska. More detail about how the LAL national reading and writing promotion program encourages young readers in grades 4-12 to explore what books mean to them by writing a personal letter to an author is available at:

<http://centerforthebook.nebraska.gov/programs/LAL.html>



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Our Historical Commitment to Public Education

Celebrating its 150th year in 2017, the Nebraska State Education Association is the oldest professional organization in Nebraska. This association, throughout most of its history, has consisted of professors, teachers, principals, college administrators and school superintendents, who have provided both the professional and political leadership to secure the foundations of public education in this state. It is a continuing legacy for all Nebraskans.

Are our public schools and colleges a legacy that we can take for granted? Education was not a certainty early in our history. In the fall of 1867, concerned citizens gathered in Brownville to create the principles that continue to guide efforts to foster good schools in Nebraska. It would not be an easy task. Less than 40 percent of school-age children attended school at that time. There were virtually no standards for becoming a teacher and no standards for schools or school instruction. With all of these issues as a background, this first meeting adopted a commitment to continue "...elevating the profession of teaching and the interests of schools in Nebraska." Over the ensuing 150 years, that commitment has framed a continual battle to maintain high standards for our schools... and to preserve the essential opportunity and character of public education.

Continual Division

For those who understood the importance of education to our state, the problems must have seemed overwhelming. There were not enough experienced teachers and no law on teacher training or qualifications. In fact, there were simply not enough teachers of any qualification. On average, in the early days of statehood, there was only one teacher for every 61 students in Nebraska.

Ironically, the lack of any legal requirement that children attend school at all probably eased the problem of teacher availability. The teacher shortage plagued many communities, but so did the inaccessibility of schools, especially high schools. For rural students, free public high schools would not become a reality until the 1920s. That decision was preceded by a Nebraska Supreme Court case to deter-

mine whether it was even constitutional to provide access to tuition-free high schools for rural students. That issue of "who pays the bill" for education in Nebraska has been a continual dividing point.

Is public education finally "safe" in Nebraska? The record of excellence of Nebraska schools is clear, but there are significant issues that continue to promise future threats to our public schools.

The issue of "who pays" for our public community schools, colleges, and universities continues to be a significant factor in funding for education. Local communities may be willing to significantly invest in local, community schools, but are often far less willing to help fund schools for other communities, for mobile students in higher education, or for local communities of "other" students ("Dreamers," foster children, transient students, etc.). This problem is intensified by the growing dissimilarity, in terms of ethnicity, race, or language, between students and teachers. This difference also explains, in part, the growing "flight" from public schools to home-schools, private schools, and "charter" schools.



"...elevating the profession of teaching and the interests of schools in Nebraska": NSEA Executive Director Craig R. Christiansen reviews the 150-year commitment to public education at the 1867 Brownville historical marker.

A Dangerous Issue

An equally dangerous issue is the elimination of the "fixed costs" of full-time employees. Now estimated to teach more than 60 percent of all college courses in America, part-time staff members in higher education teach with low pay, no continuing contract, and no benefits. This model threatens the integrity of higher education as a stable learning community and, as a cost-saving model, may be expected to spread to K-12 education.

Our public schools are the foundation of our communities and our state. The meaning of our continuing commitment to public education is simple. The NSEA will *always* fight to improve and protect public education. With other friends of education, we have done that for 150 years. Can we count on you, too?

This is Dr. Christiansen's 130th – and last – column for The Voice. On February 28th he leaves to return to his first love: research and teaching.

No Rate Increase in BlueSenior Classic

Low Utilization of Plan Provides Another Year of Stable Rates

Utilization for NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic, the Medicare supplement endorsed by NSEA-Retired and underwritten by Blue Cross of Nebraska, has been less than projected for the past 12 months. As a result, there will be no increase in rates for 2017. NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic sets rates for the calendar year beginning on Jan. 1, 2017, through Dec. 31, 2017.

NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic has optional dental coverage. It is the only Medicare supplement that has dental coverage as part of the supplement itself. The dental coverage is the same PPO dental coverage that retirees younger than 65 have in their EHA insurance product. If you decline dental coverage when you first enroll in NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic, you will not be allowed to add dental coverage in the future.

Rates for NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic have been very stable for the past decade. In the nine years since 2008, the general medical premium increase for NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic has been 0 percent; 0 percent; -0.5 percent (yes, a decrease of half-a-percent); 9 percent; 0 percent; 0 percent; 1 percent, 0 percent, and 5.1 percent.

Subscribers to NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic are rated by age, rather than by individual ages. The age bands (i.e. ages that have the same premium) are: 65-66; 67-69; 70-74; 75-79; 80-84; and 85-plus.

The BlueSenior Classic rates for 2017 can be found on the NSEA-Retired website at:

www.nsea.org/retired

Scroll down the page to find the link to the rates.

Lobby the Legislature

On Tuesday, Feb. 7, NSEA-Retired members will gather in Lincoln to address legislative issues. It's not too late to attend!

Of particular concern to retirees is the taxation of Social Security benefits. The Legislature passed LB987 two years ago to reduce the tax burden on Social Security beneficiaries. NSEA-Retired members will also visit with senators about bills that NSEA has identified as priority bills.

Lobby Day will start with an issue awareness training to familiarize members with the bills that are up for consideration. First-time Lobby Day attendees will have an orientation at 8:30 a.m. to learn how to effectively lobby senators prior. Registration and training will take place in the 4th floor conference room of NSEA, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE.

There is no registration fee for members to participate. Guests are asked to pay \$10 to cover the costs of the program.

Register for Lobby Day on the NSEA-Retired website at:

www.nsea.org/retired

You may also call Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047. The deadline for registration is Friday, Feb. 3.

Intergenerational Mentoring Ready to Take Flight

Applications are now being accepted for participation in the 2017 Intergenerational Mentoring workshop. Registration deadline is Friday, Feb. 3.

Intergenerational Mentoring Activities are planned for Friday and Saturday, Feb. 24-25 at the NSEA Headquarters building in Lincoln. The activities will begin at about 1 p.m. on Friday and conclude with lunch on Saturday.

Gene Grooms, a retired NEA staffer, will facilitate the program again this year.

Retired teachers have much experience to share with new teachers starting their careers. NSEA-Retired joins with the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) to allow retirees to assist SEAN members as they make the transition from full-time student to full-time teacher.

The program needs you to share your vast experience with the next generation of public educators. There is a selection process, and the roster will be finalized by the first week of February!

For details and to apply online go to:

www.nsea.org/2016IGLMentor

You may also reach out to NSEA-Retired Liaison Duane Obermier at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

duane.obermier@nsea.org

— Renae Kelly, Editor
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Foster Joins LEA as Field Staffer

Former Teacher Worked for Chancellor Perlman

A former teacher-turned-attorney has joined the staff of the Lincoln Education Association as an organizational specialist.

Susan Foster began working with LEA members in early January and assumed the duties of former organizational specialist Matt Erb, who resigned effective Feb. 1.

Foster began her professional career as a teacher with the Millard Public Schools, teaching second, third and fifth grade at Aldrich and Ezra elementary schools.

Wishing to have a larger voice to advance the teaching profession and the accompanying skills to do so, she left the classroom to pursue a law degree. While in law school she served as a legal intern and research assistant, graduating from law school in 2009 with a specialization in labor and employment law. For nearly six years she worked as a senior associate attorney with

the Jackson Lewis law firm in Omaha.

Recruited by former University of Nebraska Chancellor Harvey Perlman, she accepted the position of Assistant to the Chancellor for Institutional Equity and Compliance as the Title IX Coordinator.

Foster said that in spite of her other assignments and work, the LEA position “is the kind of work I envisioned performing when I went to law school. I believe public education is critical to our success as a democracy and country. Teachers need support from representatives who are passionate about them and education as I am.”



Foster

LEA President Rita Bennett said “Susan’s experience, combined with her passion for supporting teachers and public education make her uniquely qualified. I know she will be an asset to the members of LEA.”

Erb plans to return to teaching.

SEAN’s Vrana Headed to Orlando

UNL Junior Picked for Leadership Summit

University of Nebraska-Lincoln education major Evann Vrana is one of 11 students from across the country selected to attend the National Education Association’s Leadership Summit in Orlando Feb. 24-26.

The summit is designed to deliver a unified, strategic, and interdisciplinary approach to leadership development in educators that will reinforce and support leadership competencies in six strategic areas. The goal is to develop leaders and prepare them with the knowledge, skills and abilities to be effective in the classroom and their association.

In addition to 11 students, more than 1,000 educators from across the country are expected to attend.

A native of Wahoo, Vrana is a family and consumer science education major. As a junior, she is the Underclass Representative on the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) Executive Committee.

She is vice president of UNL’s SEAN Chapter, and is involved in the New Student Enrollment International Welcome Team.

Vrana also works with Studies of the United States Institute (SUSI) as a peer mentor; serves as an ambassador for the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS); serves on the CEHS Student Advisory Board; is a member of Students Together Against Cancer (STAC), and of the Nebraska



Vrana

Women’s Leadership Network.

Have Your Contact Details Changed?

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

How? Log on to the NSEA website and click on the ‘Member Info’ button on the left side of the screen. Then click on the ‘For Members’ link and look for the ‘Member Update’ icon in the center of the next screen, and follow directions. Keep your issue of The Voice near, as the mailing label includes your membership number, used to access your information. The NSEA website is at:

www.nsea.org

Willie Steele

William Allen “Willie” Steele, 58, Grand Island, formerly of the Greeley-Wolbach area, died on Dec. 28, 2016.

A Giltner High School graduate, Steele served three years in the Marines and then as a police officer at St. Paul and deputy sheriff for Howard County before serving another four years in the Marines. He was a police officer in Broken Bow from 1990-98 before teaching in Kansas, and then at Wolbach, now Central Valley Public Schools.

At Central Valley, he coached basketball and track, and led the football team to two state titles.

His wife Connie Jo, three sons and seven grandchildren survive.

Marilyn Arrants

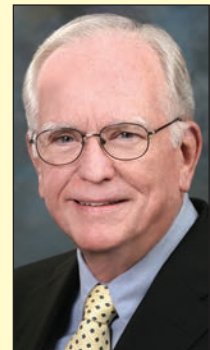
Marilyn Arrants, 69, Grand Island, died on Jan. 6.

A Kearney native, Arrants earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Kearney State College. She taught at District R-5 near Holdrege before taking a grade school teaching job at Ravenna. She taught briefly at Overton before joining the staff at Grand Island in 1976. She was an NSEA member for her entire career.

She was a passionate reader and writer of poetry, and had several works published.

She is survived by husband Donald and four children.

VOTE for Roger Rea



NSEA-Retired Vice President
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Royers Featured in Podcast Series

'Leading' Broadcasts Look at Teaching, Policy, Education Equity

"Leading from the Classroom," a new podcast series featuring firsthand accounts from the 2016 State Teachers of the Year, features NSEA member and Millard West High School teacher Tim Royers among the first seven episodes.



Royers

Each episode features a teacher sharing a personal and poignant moment that crystallized the importance of teaching and of being a teacher. The teachers speak as

advocates and ambassadors for sound education policy, for the teaching profession, and for the needs of their students.

Royers advocates for the need to put more emphasis on social studies and civics education.

The series is produced by the not-for-profit educational services organization NWEA in partnership with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The teachers talk on a number of themes and topics, including the impact teachers can have on local, state, and federal education policies; the critical need for education equity, not just equality; the necessity of understanding classroom teaching as a profession; and the efforts they make to reach and teach all their children, especially those with additional challenges.

To listen, go to:

nwea.us/TimRoyersTOY2016

Additional episodes of "Leading from the Classroom" were released starting in January.

Speaking of Education

"I consider it important, indeed urgently necessary, for intellectual workers to get together, both to protect their own economic status and also, generally speaking, to secure their influence in the political field...Indeed, it is the proper task to defend academic freedom, without which a healthy development of democracy is impossible."

— Albert Einstein,

Theoretical Physicist (1879-1955)
Founding member of AFT Local 552
Princeton University

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



A flock of ukuleles! NSEA member and Chase County Schools music teacher Jodie Liess displays the 30 ukuleles she was able to purchase thanks to NSEA's Belz/Lynch/Krause Educational Grant Fund. The grant program, among other considerations, may be used for development of instructional materials. Liess said teaching ukuleles to fifth and sixth graders is an extension of what is taught to fourth graders using recorders, and will fill a void in musical offerings at that grade level.

The grant honors former NSEA Executive Directors John Lynch and Paul Belz, and Helen Krause, the first Nebraskan to sit on the NEA Executive Committee.

Make Beautiful Classroom Music

Provided by Susan Wraspir, a sixth grade teacher at Olympic Middle School in Auburn, WA:

"There is research indicating that instrumental music truly helps students learn. However, anything with lyrics tends to pull us out of that receptive, creative, super cognition mode. I have found that movie soundtracks are a great way to use music in my classroom. My students love the soundtracks for Braveheart, Lord of the Rings, and Star Wars - The Phantom Menace. I will play the soundtrack for The Little Mermaid or Lilo & Stitch when we need an energy pick up. I would recommend anything by John Williams. When I have after school detention, I sometimes play a little hardball with these darlings! I'll put on a CD of Strauss waltzes or even opera! I strongly recommend using music in your classroom, the power and emotions it evokes will truly benefit your students."

Sign up for Works4Me at: nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html

