

THE

VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ♦ February 2018



MERGING PASSION & MISSION

"If Not Us, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?"

**NSEA Joins Alliance
to Back Education Bills**

**Only Briesse's Property Tax Relief
Bill is Realistic**

DA 2018 to Veer from Recent History

Friday Sessions Open to All Members

Each year for 150 years, NSEA has held an annual meeting, known as Delegate Assembly.

It has easily been years — decades! — since the Association hosted an Assembly like the one planned in April!

Elected delegates — and, for the first time, any member who would like to attend — will find an agenda filled with professional development opportunities!

The Friday evening, April 27, session will include at least 10 breakout sessions on issues of use and importance to you. Social justice, bullying, student loan debt and teacher appraisal are among topics under consideration (see box).

Also on the agenda for Friday night: A brief keynote by NEA Executive Committee member Eric Brown. He is a high school biology teacher in Evanston, IL. Brown was elected to the Executive Committee in July 2015.

A reception for all will conclude the

Professional Development That Appeals to All

Professional development topics will focus on the five key areas of NSEA's new strategic plan. NSEA President Jenni Benson said that in addition to active teachers, there will be topics of interest to Higher Ed members, early career educators, minority members, college students, retirees and education support professionals.

Tentative professional development topics include trauma-informed classrooms; bullying; NEA's Degrees Not Debt program; brain injury; motivation; legislative updates; teacher appraisal; social justice and more. Up to 10 options may be available, with each topic available at least twice during the evening.

Friday night session.

Delegate Assembly is the Association's annual business meeting. Elected delegates traditionally set policy and dues, elect officers and conduct other business as needed. Those business items will be the focus of the Saturday, April 28, session.

Among Saturday delegate duties will be discussion and debate of any proposed changes to Bylaws, any proposed new Resolutions or New Business Items. Dues for 2017-18 will also be set by Delegates on Saturday.

Delegates will also, for the first time, elect an at-large representative of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee to the Association Board of Directors. This board seat was previously appointed by the NSEA president.

To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building representative, or your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

All sessions will be held at The Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

Consider Filing a Nomination for One of NSEA's Delegate Assembly Awards

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

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 16, 2018, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA. Online nomination forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

www.nsea.org

The 2018 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel April 27-28. NSEA members are eligible for:

■ **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2016-17 school year.

■ **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.

■ **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in his or her job.

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

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

■ **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members and/or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.

■ **Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding communication within the association.

Also to be presented:

■ **Friend of Education:** Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.

■ **Media:** Recognizes a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Cover: Three college roommates at Hastings College have taken on a unique mission: they hope to recruit others to follow them into the teaching profession. Learn more on

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Cover Photo by Joe Brown



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Great Public Schools For Every Child

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Regularly cited by the State Education Association Communicators, including these honors: Best Magazine, Best News Story, Best Feature Story, Best Photography, Best Editorial Design.



We Are All Political



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“

With each step, phone call, knock and letter, my focus has been for the education of ALL children, the well-being of ALL children and for the betterment of the working and learning conditions in our public schools.

”

As a child, I never dreamed I would be considered “political.”

Yet here I am, working for students and educators from an office directly across the street from the Nebraska State Capitol, while that iconic building is in full legislative/political mode. I can see senators and power brokers as they enter and depart from the building’s west entrance. I can watch as rallies and protests are staged on the steps in front of the west entrance.

Occasionally, I look out my office window and reflect on the road that brought me to this point, reviewing the travels and stops along the way that delivered me to this “political” life.

It’s been 25 years since my family returned to Nebraska after a detour to Texas for several years. My brother’s wife had passed away, and he was left with three young children in his care. He needed help, so we found a big house on an acreage in the Malcolm school district, and we shared our home with my brother’s family. Together we had six children, ages two through 10. I took a teaching job in Lincoln.

Bond Issue at Malcolm

The Malcolm school bus came by and took five of the children to school each day. Meanwhile, the school district needed a new high school. They knew I was a big supporter of public schools and they soon came looking for volunteers. Thus started my involvement on my first school bond issue.

I joined the bond issue campaign because I knew the new building would provide better outcomes for kids and families in the Malcolm district. One thing led to another and I began to participate in the Lincoln Education Association’s school board and legislative contact teams. I started as a building representative and then was elected to the LEA Board of Directors. With each position I learned more and more about the how and why of advocating for public schools.

I have taught Special Education for more than 30 years. As you know, there are a lot of rules, regulations and mandates when serving children with special needs. Until I started my Association work I didn’t really think too much about the whys of all those requirements. Knowledge and experience opened my eyes to the value of Association involvement, and my Association

work was spurred further by the testing requirements attached to the reauthorization of “No Child Left Behind.” There was a need to make those regulations reasonable as they pertained to children who received special education services, and I added my voice to the discussion.

A Huge Task

Over the years, I have interviewed candidates and lobbied elected officials, written letters on education topics, made phone calls and knocked on doors to promote candidates and issues.

With each step, phone call, knock and letter, my focus has been for the education of ALL children, the well-being of ALL children and for the betterment of the working and learning conditions in our public schools.

That focus is true of your NSEA staff, as well. Our dedicated Association staff watches the Legislature and the State Board of Education, among other political bodies, closely. A group representing staff, management and governance we call the Government Relations Team meets regularly to review issues and legislation. Members of that team have read more than 150 new legislative proposals dealing with education, and continually monitor the nearly 300 education-related bills now active in the Legislature. It is a huge task, but we are up for it.

Add Your Voice

One state senator told me recently that he could not fathom why so few educators are politically active. He knew that political decisions made at the school board level and at the state level affect nearly every aspect of a teacher’s school day. Thus, if teachers – the experts in the field – do not speak up for our students and our profession, someone else will make those decisions based on inadequate information and input.

I am honored to represent members as your Association president. I am proud of the work you do and continually amazed by the wonderful teaching I see as I cross the state and visit classrooms.

I would ask that you please consider adding your voice to the chorus of members who help our elected representatives better understand the needs and accomplishments of our public schools.

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**APR = Annual Percentage Rate. Rates, terms and conditions are subject to change and may vary based on creditworthiness, qualifications and collateral conditions. All loans subject to approval. Rates effective as of 1/2/2018. New money only. No Collateral Required. Payment example: For a \$5,000 personal loan for a term of 48 months at 8.99% APR, rate is 8.63%, the monthly payment will be \$125.47. Debt protection is available. Credit qualifications and other restrictions may apply. Offer expires 2/28/2018.



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Early Career Teachers: Use 'School Me'

Teaching Tips Cover Classroom Management, Parent Conferences, More

If you are an early-in-your-career-educator, the National Education Association has a new service aimed squarely at your needs.

The NEA is expanding and rebranding its support for early career educators. Now, the former NEA Today for New Educators website has been recast as NEA Today's School Me.

School Me features blog posts, podcasts, and videos from a diverse group of NEA members, covering everything from classroom management tips, to handling parent meetings.

School Me launched in mid-January and features mountains of fresh, mobile-friendly content, sourced from some of NEA's most experienced educators. The site provides guidance, tips, and tricks-of-the-trade, based on actual experience – tools and tips from educators, provided by educators!



The blogs and podcasts feature real stories from educators, derived from their own unique experiences and the resources provide advice on how to navigate the dynamic education profession. School Me's do-it-yourself, social-friendly videos offer step-by-step visuals of how to create fun and quick classroom activities for students.

Check out School Me and share it with your colleagues as one of the best resources for new educators to help them grow into seasoned professionals.

The new content is also available for sharing from NEA Today's Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Pinterest accounts, as well as on www.neatoday.org. You can also subscribe to

the School Me podcast on iTunes.

Find the School Me content at:

nea.org/schoolme

If you know someone who would like to become a contributor, encourage them to submit ideas to:

newedsubmissions@nea.org

Senators Urged to Pass Abuse Legislation

Bill to Require Posting of Hotline Number

When NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell testified on LB888 before the Legislature's Education Committee, she made it personal.

The proposal, offered by Omaha Sen. Justin Wayne, would require schools to post the child abuse and neglect toll-free telephone hotline.

Fennell taught first, fourth and sixth grades in Omaha for 23 years, and is a past Nebraska Teacher of the Year. She shared two personal stories from her classroom.

Early in her career she reported the abuse of a young girl. During a lesson on personal safety, the child approached Fennell and reported that she was being sexually abused nightly by a member of her family. Fennell reported the abuse and the child was removed from the home. However, that did not end the girl's nightmare.

"Shortly after being placed, we found out that she was being abused in foster care," said Fennell. "Luckily, I was able to talk to a friend who agreed to be a foster care parent and provided for this child in her home for several years. However, we know from recent investigations by the Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare that this is an ongoing problem."

In a second instance, Fennell had a very kind, shy young man in her fourth-grade

classroom. He was a hard worker, but he would often fall asleep during class.

"When I pulled him aside and quietly questioned why he was sleeping in class he looked at me and then down to the ground and said, 'Well we keep the lights on at night because the bedbugs and the mice are so bad and it's hard to sleep.'"

Fennell said the school contacted child protective services, but nothing was done. Later, the boy came to class with a bruise on his cheek and said his father hit him.

"I personally contacted the child abuse hotline, filed a report and sent photographs of the bruises," she said. "The children were not removed from the home. My principal was so incensed that she brought in the social worker to her office, demanding action. Nothing

happened."

Shared Frustrations

Three weeks before Christmas 2017, Fennell was contacted by a family specialist with Nebraska Families Collaborative informing her that the young man and his sister were in foster care and all parental rights were being terminated.

"It took five years for the children to be removed from the home. The younger sister was so badly sexually abused that she is now in a long-term residential treatment in Kansas," said Fennell.

The agency had reached out to Fennell looking for adults who might take both chil-

dren over the holidays. When they asked the young man if there was any adult who cared about him he responded with these words: "Well, my fourth grade teacher said I was her favorite, will you call her?"

Fennell was grateful that the social worker reached her. Fennell's family hosted the teen and his sister for the holiday and Fennell is now his court-appointed guardian.

"I am profoundly saddened that they had to endure years of abuse before adults would step in and intervene," she said.

At a legislative hearing a day earlier, Sen. Steve Erdman of Bayard shared his frustration with the number of students who begin college unprepared to learn.

"I share your frustration senator," Fennell told the Education Committee. "But I can tell you that this young man, who is now a sophomore in high school, is not on grade level and has a long uphill climb as he prepares for adulthood. The years of abuse have affected not only his psychological development but also his academic achievement. Our kids are faced with complex problems and so they need complex solutions."

LB888 would be one step in the right direction, she said. It is important to have reporting information readily at hand when a situation occurs.

But, "if lawmakers truly want to provide the safest environment for each of our children, it's not just about making sure we know how to report those in danger," said Fennell. "It's also about making sure that the appropriate interventions are put in place so that our children are truly safe."



Fennell



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Working with Watermeier: These NSEA members talked about education with Sen. Dan Watermeier, Syracuse, at the NSEA Capitol District's Legislative Dinner in December. Seated are Mindy Wolfgang, OR-District 1 Palmyra, left, and Watermeier. Standing, from left, are Michelle Salberg and Chris Salberg, Sterling; Burke Brown, OR-District 1 Palmyra; Megan Brown, Syracuse-Dunbar-Avocca; Devin Garcia, Lewiston; and Jay Sears, NSEA organizational specialist.

Suite of Bills Invests in Students

NSEA Joins Alliance Favoring Ed Legislation

Growing income inequality means more students arrive at the schoolhouse door each day with growing needs and challenges.

Meanwhile, the state has been lowering its state aid investment in children and public schools.

An alliance of education and religious organizations, including NSEA, have partnered to support a suite of bills now before the Nebraska Legislature. The package proposes investments in Nebraska's future that will help public school students perform even better.

The bills would broaden mental health services for children in public and private schools; give greater access to a supplemental nutrition program for children in poverty; upgrade the state's investment in early childhood education; offer more career training



Nebraska Legislature

Competing Plans Try to Balance the Stool Briese Offers Best Property Tax Relief Plan

There is a race to the Legislative finish line for a solution to the property tax imbalance in Nebraska.

Nebraska's historical dependency on the three-legged stool of taxes – property, income and sales – is dangerously out of whack. The property tax leg of that imaginary stool is far too tall. At least three competing proposals to even out those legs are vying for attention in the Nebraska Legislature. NSEA sees a plan by Albion Sen. Tom Briese as the most reasonable and has thrown support behind his LB1084. Here are the plans:

■ Briese's LB1084 would broaden the sales tax base, add a high-earner income tax and increase the sales tax by a half cent. The increased state funding would be directed to K-12 education and property tax relief. The bill would also remove a long list of current sales tax exemptions.

■ LB947, introduced by Sen. Jim Smith, Papillion, on behalf of the governor, would provide a refundable credit of up to 10 percent of property taxes, capped at \$230 for homeowners. There is no cap for ag landowners, and out-of-state landowners do not qualify. There are also income tax cuts which primarily benefit the top earners and corporations (further shortening that leg of the mythical stool). Finally, there is a "trigger" that automatically implements tax cuts if there is a tax revenue forecast error. Such triggers have been tried – and repealed – in Kansas and Oklahoma, where they created disaster.

■ LB829, introduced by Sen. Steve Erdman, Bayard, would create a refundable state income tax credit of 50 percent of property taxes paid to schools. That would require the state to come up with more than \$1 billion in property tax refunds – one quarter of the entire state budget. The bill offers no revenue sources for those refunds.

LB1084 is the most reasonable, fiscally responsible offering now before senators.

If lawmakers fail to address the property tax issue, signatures are now being collected to place a version of Erdman's LB829 on the ballot in November. NSEA urges members NOT to sign the property tax petition.



Briese

options; and increase the investment in special education; among other items.

Many of the proposals would result in direct property tax relief and superb return on investment.

“We have growing needs, shrinking budgets and an overreliance on property taxes,” said Ann Hunter-Pirtle, executive director for Stand for Schools, a nonprofit dedicated to advancing public education in Nebraska.

“Those factors exacerbate inequality, overburdens taxpayers and harms our most vulnerable kids,” said Hunter-Pirtle.

Special Education Support

NSEA President Jenni Benson spoke at a news event announcing the suite of bills. She voiced support for the package, particularly legislation that would increase state funding of special education costs. Benson taught special education for 30 years.

“Teachers believe in making sure public schools work for every child.

“This effort is designed to do just that – and we believe that legislators who are serious about lifting up our children and improving public schools will support the bills outlined here.

“I assure you there is no greater investment for our individual and collective future, than the investment in the education of our children,” she said.

LB876, sponsored by Omaha Sen. Rick Kolowski, would require the state to reimburse school districts for at least 80 percent of allowable costs for special education programs. The state now reimburses for about 49 percent. That increase in state aid would be direct property tax relief, said Benson.

Also supporting the package are the Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB), the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA) and the Baptist Pastors and Ministers Conference of Omaha, among others.

Investment Rather than Divestment

NASB Executive Director John Spatz said Nebraskans hear the constant drumbeat asking elected officials to “run government like a business.

“My organization represents more than 1,700 elected officials in this state who know that to run government like a business, you can’t just slash budgets to the bone with no vision for the future,” said Spatz.

“Any business that operated that way would fail. Instead, we would invest in the wisest possible programs to put us on a better track for the future,” he said. “That’s what this effort is all about, and we’re proud to be a part of it.”

Hunter-Pirtle said Nebraska has excellent public schools, though they are far from perfect.

“The answer to public schools’ challenges is not divestment or privatization in

Two Proposals Threaten Funding For K-12 Schools, Colleges, University

Voucher, Tax Credit Scams are Fiscally Irresponsible

Two proposals to divert public dollars to private, parochial and corporate schools appear poised to generate debate, and potentially enough support to move forward during this legislative session.

LB295 and LB804 were proposed by Sen. Jim Smith, Omaha, and Sen. Lydia Brasch, Tekamah, respectively. Both would rob public tax dollars from the state treasury and funnel those dollars to private or corporate schools. Diverting state tax dollars to private and corporate interests erodes funding for short-changed K-12 schools, as well as community colleges, state colleges and the University of Nebraska, all of which have seen near-crippling cuts in recent years. **NSEA strongly opposes both bills.**

LB295 would give corporate and individual taxpayers a tax credit for contributing to private scholarship-granting groups such as a private or charter school. Corporations could claim a credit of \$150,000 per year; an individual taxpayer could claim up to \$5,000. The scholarship-granting groups would then give scholarships to assist low-income students to attend private schools.

LB295 raises fundamental issues under the state constitution. It also raises vital questions about subsidizing private schools with public tax dollars, at the same time legislators fail to adequately fund public schools.

The state constitution clearly prohibits the Legislature from appropriating public funds for sectarian education. While that appropriation would be achieved circuitously through a tax credit, it is, in fact, an expenditure of public funds.

Beyond constitutional concerns, a new program that will cost millions – in the face of a pressing \$200 million revenue shortfall – is not aligned with fiscally conservative ideals. LB295 is on first round debate in the Legislature.

LB804 would expand the state income tax deduction of 529 College Savings Plan contributions to include private, K-12 tuition. Before the 2017 federal tax rewrite, 529 College Savings Plans could only be used for college tuition/expenses. LB804 would allow tuition to private K-12 institutions to qualify as a 529 expense – and give tax dollars to private and religious institutions.

LB804 would allow up to a \$10,000 Nebraska income tax deduction per year for tuition at a K-12 private school. Only taxpayers who send their children to private schools would see a tax break. LB804 would also eliminate fiscal responsibility for public tax dollars, widening the \$200 million budget shortfall. This scheme would cost Nebraska millions in state revenue – \$7-10 million a year to start – severely shortchanging the funding of our public schools and universities.

NSEA encourages members to contact their senator and urge defeat of both bills.

the form of charter schools, vouchers, or tax credits—it is investment in our children and our state’s future,” said Hunter-Pirtle.

Among other highlights in the package:

■ **Behavioral health:** LB998 by Fremont Sen. Lynne Walz creates a school behavioral and mental health program in Nebraska’s 19 Educational Service Units. Under the plan, a social worker will staff each ESU and would connect students with local mental health and behavioral health services. The effort would be funded by a public-private partnership.

■ **Early Childhood:** NSEA supports LR270CA, a plan that would extend the ages of children eligible for public education from ages 5 to 21 to ages 3 to 21. The extension of early childhood education would pay big benefits, NSEA President Jenni Benson told the Education Committee on Jan. 23.

“Studies show that there is a \$13 return on every \$1 invested in high-quality early childhood education,” said Benson. Further,

she said, one study found that individuals enrolled in a quality early childhood education program earn up to \$2,000 a month more than those who were not.

The plan, offered by Sen. Rick Kolowski, Omaha, would become a ballot issue to change the state constitution, if approved by the Legislature.

Also offered by Sen. Kolowski is LB877, which would increase the early childhood funding in the state aid formula from 60 percent to 100 percent. This bill would also offer a great return on investment, as well as direct property tax relief.

■ **Expanded Learning Opportunities:** LB246 allows a school district to exceed its budget limitation for expanded learning opportunity programs, providing students with programming, support and activities after school, on weekends and when school is not in session, under the bill introduced by Lincoln Sen. Adam Morfeld. “Many school districts in the state, especially in rural areas, do not currently have

the authority to invest in these kinds of programs, even if the funds are available,” said Morfeld.

■ **Career Education:** LB575, by Sen. Kolowski, establishes a new aid program and requires the State Department of Education to provide funding for education programs of excellence and for additional student training and certification. Also offered is LB1108, by Sen. Burke Harr, Omaha, creates the Youth Opportunities in Learning and Occupations Fund and offers grants to certain employers and nonprofit corporations providing programs, services, or training that results in employment.

■ **School Nutrition:** LB770 makes sure children have nutritious food to eat not just during the school day, but throughout the year. Omaha Sen. John McColister proposal would raise the income eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to 158 percent of the federal poverty level for families from 130 percent. And from Fremont Sen. Lynne Walz is LB771, which would remove the co-pay that low-income students must pay for school breakfast and lunch. Eliminating the cost removes the final barrier for these children, allowing them to eat breakfast and lunch at school each day, and to learn without the pain and worry that accompanies hunger. “Nobody learns when they are hungry,” said Walz.

Plan Would Eliminate State Board of Education

NSEA is also monitoring a slew of bills that affect teachers and students. Those bills include:

■ **Eliminate the State Board of Education:** NSEA opposes LR-285CA, a proposed constitutional amendment to eliminate the Nebraska State Board of Education and let the governor appoint a Commissioner of Education. It was proposed by Sen. John Murante. Now, elected state board members are held accountable by voters for the decisions they make. An appointed commissioner of education without a state board would wield excessive power and would be beholden to the partisan political whims of the governor.

■ **Building Funds:** NSEA opposes LB778, by Sen. Mike Groene, North Platte, which would require school districts to get voter approval for any improvement, repair or minor expansion of facilities, however minor, before utilizing special building funds for such projects.

A school district’s special building fund property tax authority is already under the statutory \$1.05 levy cap and, as such, is limited.

The building fund authority allows school districts to save up and pay as they go for repairs, renovation and some relatively minor new building construction. By forcing an election on the smallest of renovations can be costly.

Also, LB1106, by Linehan, would make it nearly impossible for any school district to approve a levy override or bond issue. The provisions require ap-

proval of such issues by a majority of voters, plus at least half the registered voters in the school district in the last primary or general election. NSEA opposes LB1106.

■ **Early childhood education:** NSEA supports two companion bills, LB768 and LB880, which link early childhood education and economic development. Both are proposed by Omaha Sen. Justin Wayne.

LB880 would require an early childhood education element in comprehensive plans for cities. Such plans would assess the supply of quality licensed early childhood programs for children under six; evaluate the availability of quality programs and utilization of these programs; and promote early childhood health and education measures that benefit the community.

LB768 redefines the term “economic development programs” to include early childhood infrastructure development that will support early childhood education programs of recognized quality, as determined by the rating criteria provided under the Step Up to Quality Child Care Act.

■ **Sunscreen:** NSEA supports LB688, which permits students enrolled in public schools to possess and use a broad spectrum topical sunscreen without a note or prescription from a licensed health care professional. The bill was offered by Sen. Carol Blood, Bellevue.

Third Grade Reading Bill Amended

LB651, the bill introduced in 2017 that would have retained any student who was not reading at grade level by third grade, has been amended by sponsor Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, Elkhorn.

Along with Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, Linehan toured classrooms across the state in the past year to get better acquainted with reading programs and teaching needs.

Learn more about the status of LB651 in the column by NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell on Page 21.



Meeting Mark: Retired Lincoln teacher Kathy Spahr, right, met with Seward Sen. Mark Kolterman at the NSEA-Retired Lobby Day in 2017. Kolterman defended the teacher retirement plan in January.

Kolterman Defends Retirement Plan

Early in January, a true threat to the stability of the state’s teacher retirement plan emerged.

Sen. Mark Kolterman, chair of the Legislature’s Retirement Committee, spoke to reason and the threat was quickly doused.

Kearney Sen. John Lowe pushed for changes to a 20-year-old rule that, during a 60-day session, bans introduction of changes which affect the benefits or funding of a public retirement plan. The rule also bars creation of a new retirement plan in a 60-day session.

Such changes are allowed in a 90-day session. The longer session offers time for an actuarial study.

The rule change would have allowed Lowe to seek replacement of all or part of the school employee defined benefit retirement plan with a low-interest cash balance plan. Such plans, however, are bad news. They typically yield lower investment returns and lower benefits for plan participants than defined benefit plans.

Kolterman defended the plan that has benefited most Nebraska teachers since 1945 (a plan for Omaha teachers was founded in 1912). He said the rule is based on caution and was recommended by the actuarial firm advising the state.

The rule, said Kolterman, “encourages planning and thorough review and when necessary, actuarial analysis, which depending on the complexity of the analysis can take up to three weeks to conduct and issue a report. During a short session, a three-week delay can create challenges to the timing of debate and advancement through all levels of debate.”

Kolterman said the rule, “has worked well. Nebraska has some of the best funded state-administered retirement plans in the country.” The school retirement plan is 87 percent funded and is projected to be 100 percent funded by 2030. The Legislature’s Rules Committee held Lowe’s request to change the rules, ending the threat to the plan this session.

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NSEA Still Seeking Praxis Instructors, Tutors

Goal is More Candidates For Teaching Certificates

NSEA is still in the market for a handful of instructors to teach a review course on reading, writing and math skills that will assist potential teachers in readying for the Praxis Basic Skills test required for entrance to Nebraska colleges of education.

Also wanted: A handful of tutors to assist the college students who feel they may need a little extra review and understanding before taking the Praxis.

NSEA has scheduled the study sessions and tutoring at seven sites across the state to help college students prepare for and pass the Praxis Basic Skills test (see box for dates and locations).

As part of the grant through the National Education Association's Great Public Schools Fund, NSEA will reimburse instructors and tutors for their Praxis Core Project work.

Declining enrollment in colleges of education, and a desire to encourage more ethnic minorities to enter the profession, are among reasons for NSEA's push to offer such assistance.

Instructors will provide students with a one-time session which includes an overview of the Praxis Study companion, and covers the core skills of reading, writing and mathematics. If a student believes he or she requires additional work, they can request tutoring sessions. Tutors will be available to tutor individuals and/or groups of two to five students. Each student will be eligible for

Praxis Study Dates Set at Seven Sites

Omaha	UNO's Weitz Community Center	Wednesday, Jan. 31	5-8 p.m.
Omaha	UNO's Weitz Community Center	Thursday, Feb. 1	5-8 p.m.
Crete	Doane College	Tuesday, Feb. 6	5-8 p.m.
Peru	Peru State College	Tuesday, Feb. 6	5-8 p.m.
Kearney	University of Nebraska-Kearney	Tuesday, Feb. 20	5-8 p.m.
Chadron	Chadron State College	Thursday, March 1	5-8 p.m.
Fremont	Midland College	Pending	
Norfolk	Northeast Community College	Pending	

up to five hours of tutoring.

Plans call for those study sessions to happen across the state. Set locations include the Omaha area, Lincoln, Crete (Doane College), Kearney, Peru, Fremont (Midland College) and Chadron. Instructors may choose to offer their services at one or more sites.

Instructors will be paid an hourly fee for up to five hours (two hours of preparation and a three-hour instructional session). Tutors are needed at each location to serve in each of the areas of reading, writing and math. Tutors will also be paid an hourly fee for their services.

If you would like to be considered as an instructor or tutor, or if you would like to participate in the study sessions, please contact NSEA Organizational Specialists Matt Pittman or Carol Hicks at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

matt.pittman@nsea.org
carol.hicks@nsea.org

Teacher Asks About Finding Subs: NSEA Can Respond

Your Organizational Specialist Can Answer Such Questions for You

There is never a dull moment for NSEA's 18 organizational specialists. No two days the same, no two questions the alike. Consider this request for information that came in through NSEA's website from a teacher member recently:

"I am wondering about teachers having to find subs themselves. As an elementary teacher, we have been told to call our own substitutes when we need them. I can see perhaps being responsible for finding a sub for a future absence like personal day or professional leave, but I see this as added stress when you are sick or dealing with sick children at home. It also both-

ers me that teachers in our high school do not have to find their own subs for any reason. I'm wondering whether this is common practice or even a teacher's responsibility?"

Dealing with questions like that can be sticky at the building level. That's why it is best to call your NSEA organizational specialist to help you navigate such issues. Your NSEA representative can ask the question of administration – and often resolve the issue to everyone's satisfaction! – without ever revealing who posed the question.

As your professional Association, NSEA has 18 field representatives, called organizational specialists, stationed around the state. They have teaching expertise, knowledge of Nebraska Department of



Education rules and regulations, and an understanding of your school district.

As they did with this case, NSEA's organizational specialists can assist in diffusing difficult situations, offering solu-

tions and getting you back to teaching.

Whatever the question about your employment issues, classroom, bargaining situations or more, know that you can call your 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."

Have Your Contact Details Changed?

Have you moved? Have you changed your name by marriage? Are you planning to move?

If so, you can update your NSEA membership information online.

How? Log on to the NSEA website and click on the '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

Trio of Hastings College Friends Fired Up About Recruiting Teachers

While they were on their way to changing the world, Hastings College student Tahj Willingham admits that he and roommates Steven Dunham and

Casey Molifua had plenty of passion, but little direction.

Conversation in their off-campus apartment frequently tackled world-sized problems, but mustered little forward motion.

“We had passion. We tried to fight every battle that we saw. We tried to correct every injustice,” said Willingham. “We were so lost and without direction.”

Their passion didn’t merge with a mission until Instructor of Education Ann Auten encouraged them to attend the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN) spring conference in Lincoln a year ago. Willingham and Dunham attended the social justice-themed conference. NEA Student Organizer Chris Settle gave the keynote.

Settle offered ideas and challenged Willingham and Dunham to take a first step. When Molifua learned of Settle’s encouragement, he was on board. The trio began to bounce ideas off Auten, Assistant Professor of Education Lisa Smith and other Hastings College mentors, and consulted with NSEA’s state advisors to SEAN, Kristi Capek and Kristen Sedlacek.

With encouragement and inspiration from those quarters, a plan began to coalesce. All had been steered from across the country to Hastings, and at Hastings, toward teaching. In that teaching friendly environment, with all that support, it suddenly clicked: they would undertake a mission to encourage minority college students, particularly males, to consider teaching as a profession. They have since organized Ethnic and Minority Educators 4 a Legacy – EME4L – focused on recruiting those with diverse backgrounds into teaching.

They’ve had sweatshirts printed with the ‘Ethnic and Minority Educators for a Legacy’ on the front. The back of the sweatshirts carry these words: “If Not Us, Then Who? If Not Now, Then When?”

Nearly a year after their epiphany, they have traveled the country, started an after school book club for fourth and fifth graders at a local elementary school, and will soon begin traveling to Nebraska college and university campuses telling their stories. All of this is done as they ask students of all ages – especially minorities – to consider a teaching career.

Teaching Corps Not Reflective

About 32 percent of children in Nebraska’s K-12 schools are identified as minority. Yet just four percent of the state’s K-12 educators hold minority standing.

“The problem is that the public education teaching force is not reflective of its ever-diversifying student population,” said Willingham, who understands the need for a diversified teaching corps.

Growing up in Denver his parents enrolled him in predominantly white high schools. He never really experienced a classroom with a teacher of color.

“It is just the dichotomy of being black in America. You go to an all-white school and there are certain things you have to deal with that other students just don’t understand,” he said.

Post-high school, he attended community college and worked an overnight shift stamping out 30,000 credit cards over eight

hours. He decided that football would enable him to leave his factory job and neighborhood and further his education. That led him to Hastings, where he is an elementary education and physical education major. He hopes to teach and eventually move to a principalship or even a superintendency.

“I just hope to climb the educational ladder and achieve as much as I can,” he said.

Molifua graduated from Lincoln North Star in 2011 and with “football as my primary learning experience,” also landed at Hastings College. He earned a degree in exercise science in 2015, finished a master’s in physical education, and now teaches motor learning and development, and foundation of exercise science. He is also the accommodations coordinator for the college’s learning center, working with students as they move from high school to college.

In high school, Molifua found a connection with the in-school suspension supervisor.

“He had a way of connecting with the ‘bad kids,’ so to speak. He listened to us, he knew where we were coming from. He just had good ears,” said Molifua. “He was the teacher who would come and eat with us and just kind of talk with us about football practice or our geometry test.”

‘There is No Paper Trail’

Willingham said his school’s disciplinary figures, too, were usually played by minority figures, “and that’s why I think we gravitated towards them more. We would get kicked out of class on purpose to go hang out with someone who would listen.

“That goes into saying how having someone that looks like you can play a role in how effective they will be in altering your life decisions,” he said.

Dunham earned a bachelor’s degree from Hastings in 2016 and briefly worked at a sporting goods store, quickly realizing that was not a good fit. Today he is finishing a master’s degree in K-12 physical education and health. He grew up in a military family and graduated from high school in Oklahoma. His middle school PE and homeroom teacher was an African American woman.

“She wasn’t a disciplinarian, but she held me accountable for what I was doing. At that point in my life, that was what I needed,” he said. “She actually cared about who I was as a person, and that definitely has had an impact on why I plan to become a PE teacher.”



On a Mission: Many voices have influenced Tahj Frison; Hastings College Instructor of Education and Physical Education Casey Molifua; Hastings College Assistant Professor of Education Lisa Smith.

MERGING MISSION



the work of three Hastings men. From left are Nebraska Deputy Commissioner of Education Deborah Benson and SEAN Advisor Ann Auten; Steven Dunham; Tahj Willingham; Casey Molifua; and Hastings Colleague Smith.

really what we are doing is raising more awareness.”

Molifua notes that “minority” in their context is very broad. Their definition would include teachers with disabilities, LGBTQ+ teachers and others not generally seen leading a classroom.

“We always say that diversity has no face, there is not just one stamp that gets you to be ‘diverse,’” he said.

Change will take baby steps, he said. The culturally appropriate after school book club for fourth and fifth graders they helped instigate at a Hastings elementary school is an example. The club was one of their first ideas a year ago, and a teacher they had worked with in Hastings was aboard. Their first reading was in January, using books for every participant donated by NSEA’s Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee.

“It’s that trickle-down effect that I love so much – we can give that student a book and if they like the story they can read it to a sibling and it can just keep making an impact,” said Willingham.

‘If We Could Change one Life...’

The connections they have made through SEAN, and then through NSEA, have also trickled down.

“If you had told us two years ago that ‘You guys are going to be working with the president and the executive director of the Nebraska State Education Association,’ we would have laughed,” said Molifua.

Yet that has happened. NSEA President Jenni Benson said their mission has garnered wide attention and respect.

“These three young men have come so far in the past year. It will be exciting to watch and see how far they carry their mission,” said Benson. “They will become excellent teachers, excellent leaders.”

After they attended the NEA Student Program Summer Leadership Conference in Boston last summer, they were invited to present at the Black Male Educators Conference in Philadelphia. They also attended NEA’s Minority Leadership Conference in Las Vegas.

It was on one of their return flights that Dunham said they learned how simple steps can make a big difference.

Many people ask about the sweatshirt message, which Dunham said gives an opening to talk about what Nebraska’s student population looks like, what the state’s teaching force looks like, and more.

Dunham said they were touched when a woman in an airport saw the sweatshirts and began to tell her story. As it turned out, she was a retired principal, and had taught in Nebraska for 40 or so years.

“I told her what the sweater was about, and she just started bawling and couldn’t stop hugging me,” said Dunham. “She said ‘the world needs more people like you.’

“If all of this ended tomorrow, that right there would be a success story to me,” said Dunham. “If we could change one life, if all we do is change one life, then I figure it’s a success story.”

A teacher, said Dunham, touches an infinite number of lives. “You don’t know how many lives you are changing, you don’t know how many worlds you are changing,” he said. “There is no paper trail.”

‘A Calling More than a Career’

By the fall of 2015, Molifua had switched his major from education to exercise science and then, fortunately, back to education. He had walked for his bachelor’s degree and planned to spend his final fall semester playing football and working on a master’s degree. He planned to leave the master’s unfinished and begin a job search at the winter break. But his coursework that fall included a multicultural education class taught by Smith.

“It was in that multicultural class where I knew that I could make an impact in education,” he said.

Willingham was in the same education class. He called the course a turning point.

“That class just really kind of tied me in, showed me that education was a calling more than a career,” he said.

That semester was the only time the three were on the football field together. They became fast friends, and were soon roommates, spending spare time solving world problems. Molifua stayed in school and earned a master’s and was asked to join the college faculty.

‘Diversity has no Face’

Their project finally gained a razor-sharp focus at NSEA’s Teach to Lead event in Kearney in early December. The three men, along with Smith, comprised one of nine teams that brought a “problem” to the event. With the help of a facilitator and a critical friend assigned to their team, they pinpointed their goal: raise the number of minorities in Nebraska’s teaching force.

“You’re not going to be able to just throw 15 teachers, 50 minority teachers into the teaching force tomorrow,” said Willingham. “So

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UNKEA Local Building Communications, Outreach

Key Message is Value of Membership

By Dr. William Aviles, President,
University of Nebraska at Kearney Education Association

When I was asked to write about the activities of my local, the University of Nebraska at Kearney Education Association (UNKEA), it was immediately clear that though we work at the university level we are engaged in activities consistent with what many of our K-12 colleagues are doing —informing our members about union activities, gathering information for upcoming contract negotiations, and reaching out to non-members in an effort to determine what we as a union can do to have them join our cause.

Thus, in the Fall of 2017 we developed and submitted an email survey to non-members to ask them why they had not joined and what concerns they had about the union. We learned that some members felt we needed to be more proactive in addressing internal departmental conflicts and in challenging the administration on issues such as salary and workload.

Other members expressed a lack of knowledge of some of the benefits associated with membership — indicating that we need to do a better job of educating/reminding all faculty of the different selective incentives associated with joining NSEA.

Regarding our members, we hope to build on previous efforts at increasing our communication with them and giving them greater channels to influence and govern our local. In years past we have developed a steward structure providing some governing responsibilities for those who do not have the time to sit on the executive committee. We have also started a Facebook group that we hope to make more active as we get closer to our Fall 2018 negotiations with the administration.

Regarding those negotiations, we will hold a series of meetings this semester to assess what our members want to see in (or out) of our contract. These meetings will be complemented with a bargaining survey of members in the hopes of getting as much feedback as possible.

Finally, we will try to better demonstrate the value of our relationship with NSEA to members and non-members alike.

As president of UNKEA I know full well all the benefits we receive from our association with NSEA, everything from nationwide discounts on an array of services and goods, hands-on advice and data support during negotiations from NSEA staff as well as lobbying/legal resources that have not solely been focused on the K-12 community. It is our responsibility to better inform our members of these benefits and we hope that NSEA will also continue its efforts in ensuring that university faculty are not forgotten.

To that end, we will work with NSEA lobbying efforts during this spring's unicameral session seeking to support NSEA's resistance to Gov. Ricketts' cruel proposals. As Gov. Ricketts and his allies continue their war against the public sector we here at UNKEA remain proud to stand with you in this fight.

Editor's note: Dr. Aviles teaches comparative politics and Latin American politics at UNK. He has been on the UNK faculty since 2002.

SAC Museum Offers Free Admission to Teachers

Teachers interested in taking students on a field trip to the SAC Aerospace Museum near Ashland may want to take advantage of freed admission on Saturday, Feb. 10.

Educators will be allowed free admission between 10 a.m. and noon on that day, and will want to check out the Energy Explorers exhibit, an interactive exhibit about all things energy.

The exhibit provides more than 15 interactive explorations, allowing students to investigate and explore potential and kinetic energy. Students will also discover primary sources of energy and interact with circuitry using hands-on electrical components.

Teachers need only show a teacher or school identification to gain free admission. There are also free gifts for the first 50 teachers to arrive.

For details, contact Tara at 402-944-3100, extension 204, or email her at:

educordinator@sacmuseum.org



Educators File Amicus Brief in Janus Case

NEA, AAUP Argue
Strong Unions
Benefit Communities

The National Education Association and the American Association of University Professors submitted an amicus brief on Jan. 19 with the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME, Council 31*.

At issue in *Janus* is whether non-union members, who share in the wages, benefits and protections that have been negotiated into a collectively bargained contract, may be required to pay their fair share for the cost of those negotiations. The National Right to Work Committee, a tool of far-right and corporate interests, is behind the case.

The committee argues that fair share dues paid by plaintiff Mark Janus violates his First Amendment rights. NEA and the AAUP counter that a right to work law has never been read into the First Amendment, and would conflict with the court's long-established deference to state decisions about public work forces.

"Strong unions help to create strong schools for students and even stronger communities that benefit all of us," said Lily Eskelsen García, president of the National Education Association. "Unions are under attack, and those attacks are coming not just from the White House and Capitol Hill. They're happening at the ballot box and at the Supreme Court with cases like *Janus v. AFSCME*."

A comprehensive report issued last year by the Economic Policy Institute detailed how collective bargaining plays an essential role in the labor market, by raising working people's wages and supporting a fair and prosperous economy as well as a vibrant democracy. Unions and their ability to bargain collectively are an important force in reducing inequality and ensuring that low- and middle-wage workers receive a fair return on their work.

"The Supreme Court should consider the benefits of robust collective bargaining and unionization for public employers, employees and the general public, including improved government services, better educational outcomes and higher economic mobility," said AAUP General Counsel Risa Lieberwitz.

If facts, merit and law are considered, then the justices must rule in favor of upholding 40 years of precedent that support the authority of state and local governments to choose to have strong public sector systems of collective bargaining.

A ruling is expected this spring.



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EMAC Leadership: Chair of the NSEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee Isau Metes, Lincoln, right, called a January committee meeting to order with participants across the state. Seated, from left, are EMAC Vice Chair Jose Hernandez, Norfolk; committee member Karla Andazola, Lexington; Nebraska NEA Director Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Omaha; committee member Liz Carranza-Rodriguez, Lincoln; Secretary Susan Loney, Omaha; and Casey Molifua, Hastings College.

Standing, from left, are: LeDonna Griffin, Omaha; Manny Andazola, Lexington; Evelyn Brown, Douglas County Youth Center; Steven Dunham, Hastings College; Vincent Gregorio, Omaha; Tahj Willingham, Hastings College; Regina Ambroz, Grand Island; NEA Director Linda Freye, Lincoln; and Kristy Lee, Omaha.

EMAC Settles on Recommendation Plan

Members of NSEA's Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee have finalized an interview process for candidates seeking EMAC's recommendation for election to a new seat on the NSEA Board of Directors.

Members at NSEA's 2017 Delegate Assembly approved addition of an at-large seat on the statewide board of directors, specifically for representation of the Association's ethnic minority members. Unlike other board of director's seats that are elected from NSEA's six districts, the ethnic minority representative will be an at-large position representing the entire state, and elected by members at Delegate Assembly.

Now, the EMAC will interview declared candidates for the opening, and will recommend a candidate or candidates to the full Assembly. Candidates for the opening may also be nominated from the floor at the Assembly. EMAC's board approved the

process at a January meeting. Contact EMAC Vice Chair Jose Hernandez if you would like to be interviewed as a candidate. He can be reached at:

ricsktroid@gmail.com

The committee also worked on a proposed budget for 2018-19, and discussed a proposed EMAC-sponsored training to be held in Norfolk in the spring.

EMAC Chair Isau Metes, Lincoln Education Association, noted that any NSEA member is welcome to attend committee meetings.

"Everyone is welcome to attend EMAC meetings, and are encouraged to contact any of the EMAC representatives or officers if they have questions or suggestions for EMAC," she said.

Learn more about EMAC meeting dates, officers and the committee at:

nsea.org/ethnic-minority-affairs-committee-emac

EHA Advocate Spring Meetings Begin

The Educators Health Alliance and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska spring meetings are near, but there is still room on the calendar to schedule a meeting in your school district.

As many school districts have changed to the dual option health care plan, the spring meetings are a great opportunity for EHA Advocate Greg Long to provide real life examples of who should opt for the high deductible HSA qualified healthcare plan. As the EHA plan advocate, Long travels the state, presenting information and answering questions about the EHA plan. At these meetings, health care plan participants will gain a better understanding of the EHA healthcare benefits, including deductibles, out-of-pocket expenses, and drug benefits.

The meetings could save EHA plan families thousands of dollars, and are also a way for plan members to become educated about how to make the healthcare plan work on their behalf. Long's schedule is filling up quickly.

Contact Long by telephone at 402-440-9633, or by email at:

greg@chaplan.org

First Book Makes New Books, Resources Available for Educators

First Book is a nonprofit working exclusively with programs and schools serving kids in need to ensure that they have access to top quality books and educational resources at deep discounts. To become a part of the First Book network, sign up and receive immediate access to materials that the children you serve need to succeed.

Signing up with First Book is free for every educator working in a Title I or Title I eligible school or program. Books and resources can be used for Read Across America initiatives, to build classroom libraries or home libraries, meet families' basic needs and more.

To access books and resources for your students, sign up with First Book. Everyone reaching children from under-served communities is eligible to sign up and access free and low-cost books and resources.

After you've signed up, visit the First Book Marketplace to access deeply discounted brand-new books, school supplies, and basic needs items for children ages 0-18. Also check the Read Across America section created in partnership with NEA, the Social & Emotional Learning hub, the Free Resources, and more. Learn more at:

www.fbmarketplace.org

Cause of Teacher Shortage: Lack of Support

Friend of Education says Teachers Being Driven from Schools

The headline on a letter to the Grand Island Independent last fall was clear: a shortage of teachers is caused at least in part by a lack of support for those in the profession.



Peterson

The letter's author? Hastings resident Bert Peterson, former police officer, retired actuary and recipient of NSEA's 2017 Friend of Education.

He has written scores of columns and letters across the state in support of public schools and public school teachers.

His letter said "Nebraska has one of the best public education systems in America. Yet, teachers in Nebraska are being driven out of our schools and not replaced.

"The Department of Education reports that over the last three years Nebraska has had teacher shortages in almost all categories. We also have a substitute teacher shortage, which has become so dire that a bill was introduced in the Unicameral last year to allow high school graduates to be substitute teachers."

He said reasons for the shortage include:

- Federal legislation that defames teachers by ignoring decades of educational research in favor of superstition. One such superstition holds teachers accountable for the damage done to children long before the child arrives for preschool or kindergarten.

- The defamation is compounded by a few in our Unicameral who wish to privatize our public education system in favor of private and corporate (charter) schools.

- According to the United Nations' OECD, U.S. teachers earn less than 60 percent of what similarly educated workers earn. This is nearly the lowest ratio in the developed world. In Finland (the highest scoring country in international testing) that ratio is over 80 percent. A 40 percent pay increase for an American math teacher in the private sector is hard to pass up, given the punitive and slandered world of education.

He said "Parents, teachers, leaders in our teacher training colleges must make their voices heard by our legislators to be sure that we continue to put qualified teachers in front of every classroom."



Ready, Set, Ladle! Among the Fullerton Education Association members working a soup supper to benefit scholarships recently were, from left, Mary Pat Nathan, Shelly McNeff, Jen Dubas, Brianne Butcher, along with NSEA Organizational Specialist Michelle Raphael.

Fullerton EA Serves Soup for Scholars

The 29 members of the Fullerton Education Association flexed some organizational muscle in December and came up with another great gift for a graduating senior.

FEA President Jen Dubas said this was the second year of the free-will donation soup supper.

"Because of the success it has brought, we are planning to have it yearly," she said.

Success, indeed! The December soup supper netted more than \$801 for the FEA's scholarship fund.

The supper was held during a home

basketball game, and an elementary dance camp the same night brought in more community members than normal.

The soup, bars and cookies were all donated by FEA members.

Funds collected go toward the FEA scholarship fund. The FEA typically awards scholarship funds each year to a graduating senior who plans to attend college and major in education.

"We typically give one scholarship per year," said Dubas. "There have been years where we have given two scholarships."

That's one way to grow a teaching force for the future!

Protect Against Social Security Fraud by Setting Up Online Account

By Miriam Cross

The Social Security Administration is adding an extra layer of protection to online accounts.

Anyone signing in to an online Social Security account, or signing up for the first time, must provide either a cell-phone number or an email address to receive a unique, one-time code by text or email. The Social Security Administration rolled out a similar two-step process in 2016, but it restricted the extra layer of protection to text messages.

It's smart to set up an online account even if you're years from retirement. Once you've done so, identity thieves will be unable to create a fraudulent account in your name and use it to apply for benefits. In ad-

dition, you can check your earnings history against your W-2 forms or tax returns to make sure there are no gaps in your earnings record that could reduce your Social Security benefits. You can also look up estimated retirement, disability and survivor benefits and, in certain cases, request a replacement Social Security card.

To set up an account, go to www.ssa.gov/myaccount. You'll need to enter some personal details, answer questions to confirm your identity, and choose a unique username and a complex password.

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Cash in Today on End-of-Year Model Vehicles

Members Can Save Thousands on Cars

It's still a great time to get good deals on end-of-model-year cars. If you're in the market, the NEA Auto Buying Program through TrueCar is the first place to look! NEA members and their families enjoy preferred pricing, save an average of \$3,383 off MSRP on new cars, and get:

- **Used Car Discounts:** Save hundreds off the list price (Discounts not available on all cars or in all states).

- **See What Others Paid:** See what others paid for the same car so you know if you're getting a good or a great price.

- **Upfront Pricing:** See pricing, price rankings, and lock in savings on the car you want before you even leave home.

- **Enjoy a Hassle-Free Experience:** Bring in your Price Certificate to a Certified Dealer or show it on your mobile phone.

NEA members also receive TrueCar Buyer's Bonus Benefits at no additional cost, including Auto Repair Reimbursement and Auto Deductible Reimbursement – benefits that could be worth up to \$2,000 (available in most states).

To see how much you can save, go to:
www.neamb.com/buyacar

Share Your Journey and Win!

California Casualty, provider of the NEA Auto & Home Insurance Program, is giving educators a chance to win a new Dodge Journey.

NSEA members are invited to share where they are in their life's journey and enter the "Wherever Your Journey Takes You... We'll be There" sweepstakes.

The giveaway kicks off the new "Life is a Journey" campaign, reminding educators of the importance of having the right insurance coverage for their stage in life. Whether they're an excited new teacher, the nervous parent of a new driver, or about to retire, Association members can explore the various insurance solutions offered through California Casualty.

Enter to win at:

www.winajourney.com

California Casualty offers insurance with benefits for educators that include:

- Waived or reduced deductibles for damage to vehicles parked at school.

- Personal property protection for non-electronic property, including instructional materials stolen from a vehicle.

- Excess liability coverage that follows into the classroom.

- \$500 fundraising money coverage.

Five Simple Ways to Save Cash in Winter

Spend Now, Save Later When You Winterize

Winter is here and it's not too late to winterize your home to help curb high utility bills and your car to help prevent unexpected car repairs.

Here are five quick and simple tips to get you started.

1. Hire a Pro

Have a professional inspect your HVAC system. Heating your home is a large chunk of your energy bill, so it's important to have your home heating system checked regularly to make sure it's running at peak efficiency. If it's struggling due to old, dirty filters or failing components, your energy costs can go up dramatically.

Energy-Star.gov recommends having your system tuned up once per year. Contact a qualified HVAC contractor to inspect your system. For more home tips, read "15 Simple Ways to Winterize Your Home."

2. Computerize

One of the easiest ways to manage your energy use is to install a programmable thermostat. (Although there are special considerations if you have a heat pump.) These thermostats can automatically adjust the temperature in your home at certain times of the day.

Dialing back your thermostat about 7-10 degrees for 8 hours a day can cut your home heating costs by about 10 percent, depending on the severity of your climate.

Also, you can lower your home's temperature even further while the house is empty during the daylight hours, and then turn it up about the time you come home. You'll find plenty of programmable thermostats at different prices and with different features.

3. Use Light Strategically

It sounds almost too simple, but use the sun to your advantage! Open the curtains of south-facing windows to let the sun heat your home. Close them at night to keep out the cold. For a boost, try lined, insulated curtains; they can help prevent heat loss, block drafts and keep out some of the cold.

4. Update Your Lighting

Love to light up your house for the holidays? Do you put up decorations for Halloween and keep your house brightly lit with cheery colors through St. Patrick's Day? Save on electricity costs by switching to LED lights. Most decorations now have LED counterparts.

While LEDs can be a more expensive initial investment, they can last much longer than traditional bulbs, so your long-term replacement cost can be less—and less frustrating thanks to fewer burned out bulbs!

LED bulbs and fixtures also produce less heat and use less electricity, so over the long haul you'll see savings from a number of sources.



5. Get Ahead of the Maintenance Game

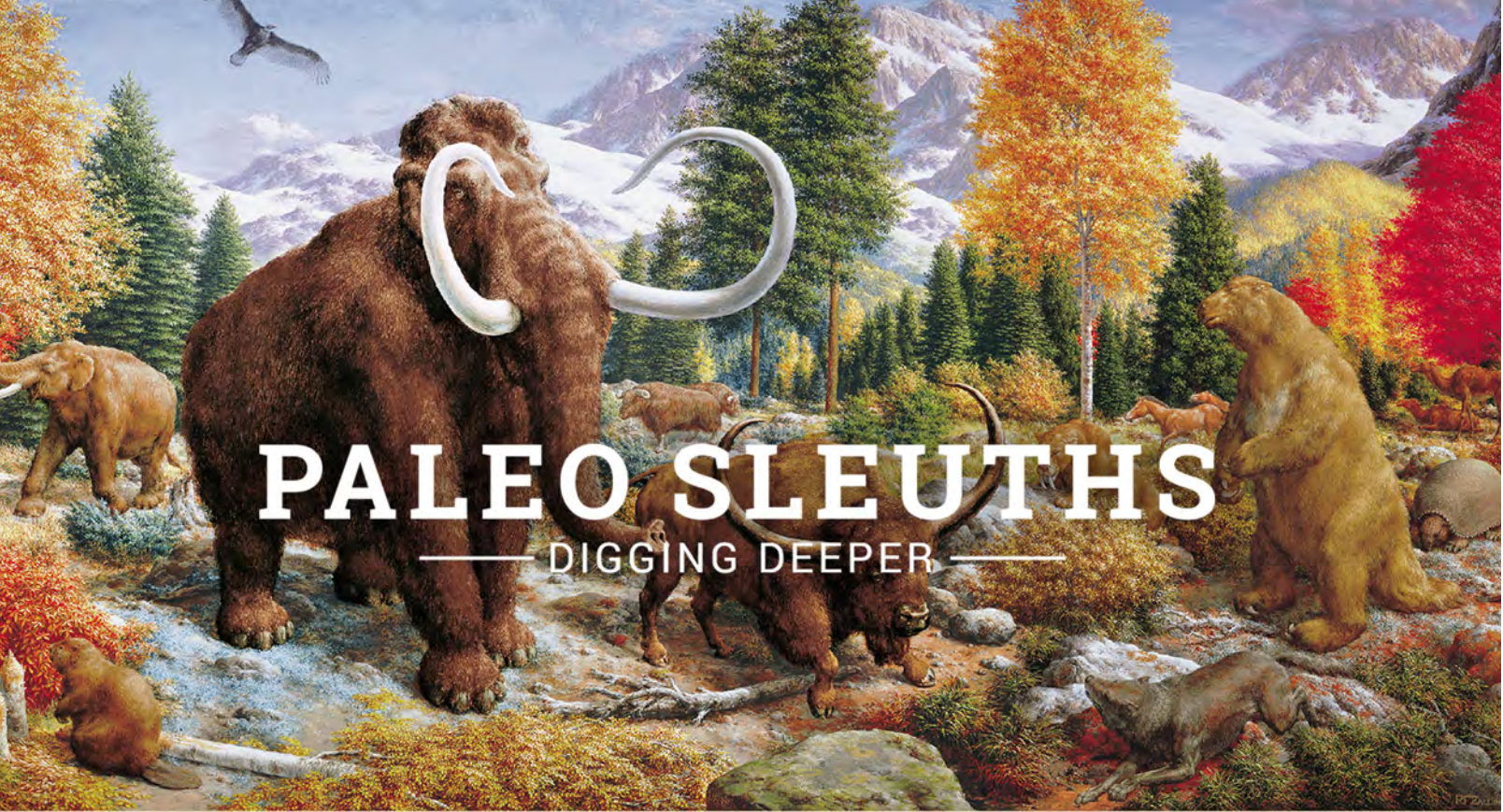
Change your automobile battery if it's old, check and replace worn belts and top off all important fluids. Taking care of the small things can help you avoid a costly break-down and expensive towing charges at a later date.

And as the temperature drops, so can your tires' air pressure. Inflating them to the correct pressure can save you money on gas.

For more information about winterizing your car read "Get Ready for Winter With Our Car-care Checklist."

6. Bonus Tip!

Here is a wonderful idea: Use your NEA member benefits! Save on a programmable thermostat, insulated curtains or even LED holiday lights when you shop at stores such as The Home Depot, Kohl's, Best Buy and more through NEA Click & Save.



PALEO SLEUTHS

— DIGGING DEEPER —


**Awaken the Paleo Sleuth
in each of your students!**

Nebraska Standards-based
Lesson Plans

Interactive
3D Models

netNebraska.org/paleo



Nebraska's  PBS & NPR® Stations



LB651: Your Voice Made a Difference



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“
...we are
extremely proud
of the impact that
our members had
on this legislation
and the potential
positive impact
it could have on
overall student
reading success.”

I want to share how the active involvement of many teachers across our state completely changed the direction of LB651, the third grade reading bill.

Last year Sen. Lou Ann Linehan introduced LB651, which mandated third grade retention for students who could not pass a grade level reading assessment. The Legislature’s Education Committee had not yet acted on the bill when Linehan exercised a rarely utilized provision which pulled the bill out of committee and into first round debate by the full Legislature.

NSEA and our members across the state fought this bill because we knew that it was not what was good for kids. Linehan’s bill did not advance, but was left for action in this legislative session.

A Common Goal

Dr. Mary Schlieder, the 2008 Nebraska Teacher of the Year and a special education teacher for the Norris Public Schools, decided it was time to exercise her teacher leadership.

“I had been emailing senators regarding education bills throughout the last session. I was new to this level of political engagement,” she said. “However, I had seen the results of misguided reform efforts in other states and I didn’t want to see that happen in our state. Senator Linehan regularly responded to my emails and took us up on the offer to visit our school.

“She came to my classroom and watched me do a reading lesson with a 10th grader who has severe dyslexia and a significant hearing impairment. He’s making tremendous strides in his specialized reading program and works hard every single day, but he’s one of the students who still appears yearly on our list of ‘not proficient’ students.

“Sen. Linehan was kind and gracious to my student, noting how she appreciated his efforts. She also visited several other classrooms that morning, witnessing our dedicated teachers and administration.

“I followed up with an email thanking her for taking the time to visit and she invited me to her office in the Capitol for lunch to continue the discussion. Sen. Linehan asked good questions and listened carefully. I explained the Response to Intervention (RTI) process many schools in our state

were already using to help struggling readers. We discussed alternative ways to meet our common goal: to help all kids be proficient readers. This included the importance of early childhood intervention programs, quality before and after school programs, and providing teachers additional training in remedial reading interventions.”

‘No One Out to Hurt Kids’

Schlieder said she learned a few things through the process. First, it is essential that educators invite legislators into classrooms. “People are getting their information (and misinformation) on media that often promotes bias and surface reporting. When legislators see what we’re actually doing for kids, perceptions change,” she said.

Second, legislators, even those who may not understand how our schools work, care just as deeply about our kids as we do. No one is out to hurt kids.

Finally, it’s not enough for teachers to just do their jobs in the classroom. If teachers are not actively engaged in informing our lawmakers, we can expect the same turmoil currently being experienced in schools in other states.

Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks joined Linehan on a statewide tour of schools that provided a firsthand look at how reading is really taught across the state. Because of their tour, LB651 is now an entirely different bill. It does not call for *any* retention and, in fact, emphasizes those practices which are most conducive to strong student learning in reading.

Still Some Concerns

Is the bill perfect? No. We are still very concerned that it calls for all school districts to offer a summer reading camp a/k/a summer school reading. We don’t know yet what effect this may have on school budgets. But we are extremely proud of the impact that our members had on this legislation and the potential positive impact it could have on overall student reading success.

Thank you to Mary and to the myriad of other teachers who advocated for students and for their profession by being in dialogue with elected leaders. Their actions are going to affect not just their own students, but children all across the state.

Wouldn’t you like to have that kind of legacy?

Nebraska Reading Tour

Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan and Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks visited schools across the state in the last year, including these locations:

Columbus
Doniphan
Elkhorn
Gothenburg
Grand Island
Hastings
Lexington
Lincoln
Norfolk
Norris
Omaha
Westside
York

Election Filing Deadline Nears for NSEA-R

Plenty of Openings for Delegates to DA, RA

While there is a lone seat on the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors open for election this year, there is plenty of opportunity for those interested in serving as delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly or the NEA Representative Assembly later this year.

An election cycle oddity left only one of 11 board seats to be contested in 2018.

Open for election is the Metro District representative seat, where Carol Krejci of Omaha is completing her first term. Candidates seeking that post will serve a three-year term beginning Aug. 15.

Also to be elected: delegates to 2018 NSEA Delegate Assembly, to be held in Lincoln on April 27-28; and delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly, to be held in Minneapolis from June 30 to July 5.

Probable Delegate Assembly numbers include four delegates from Capitol District; three each from Elkhorn and Tri-Valley districts; five from Metro District; and one each from Sandhills and Panhandle districts.

Expected openings for Representative Assembly include one delegate from Metro District; one from the remainder of the state; and three at-large delegates.

Candidates must live in the NSEA District they wish to represent. The filing deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 13. More details are at:

www.nsea.org/retired

Scottsbluff Members Give Time

Sen. John Stinner spoke at a recent meeting of the Scottsbluff Area Retired School Personnel/Nebraska State Education

Association-Retired. A “check” displayed at the meeting represented the value of the 2,018 volunteer hours the members invested in this area from June 2016 to May 2017.

According to the Independent Sector of Washington, D.C., the value of these hours is \$24.14 per hour for a total of \$48,714.52. Steve Swedberg was the volunteer with the most hours.

SARSP/NSEA-Retired meets the third Monday of each month in the Scottsbluff Runza Community Room at 11 a.m. Each speaker offers helpful information to retirees.

Retired Lobby Day

Mark your calendars for the annual NSEA-Retired Lobby Day on Tuesday, Feb. 13, at NSEA.

This is a great chance to get an update on legislation and to visit with state senators.

The day will start with an 8:15 a.m. registration and coffee and will include lunch. The luncheon speaker will be Ann Hunter-Pirtle, executive director of Stand For Schools, a Nebraska-based nonprofit



Standing For Public Schools: Lincoln Education Association-Retired President Arlene Rea and board member Tom Meyer remind us of the importance of public schools. In September U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos included the Lincoln Public School Science Focus Program, commonly called Zoo School, on a tour of Nebraska schools. Retired teachers and others lined the roads to the Lincoln Zoo to remind DeVos and others of the many choices and opportunities provided by Nebraska public schools.

dedicated to our Nebraska's tradition of public school excellence. This nonprofit supports policies that further strengthen public schools and allow every Nebraskan to develop skills they need to thrive. The Lobby Day registration deadline is Tuesday, Feb. 6. Register on line at:

www.nsea.org/RetiredLobby

Questions? Contact Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

Mentoring Volunteers Sought

NSEA-Retired received a grant to take intergenerational mentoring to three sites in Nebraska on Saturday, April 7. The event will be held at the Lifelong Learning Center in Norfolk, at UNO, and at Hastings College. This is an opportunity to work with Student Education Association of Nebraska members as they prepare for teaching and through their beginning years of teaching.

An opportunity in the spring at Chadron State College may also provide a chance for retired members in that area to be involved. Please consider this role by registering at:

www.nsea.org/2018IGM

Registration deadline is March 10, but early registrations are helpful. For more, call Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

— De Tonack

— President, NSEA-Retired



North Platte Chat: North Platte area retired teachers Marge Beatty, left, and Sherman Hirsch were among about 15 NSEA-Retired members from the area who met in mid-December for breakfast with NSEA-Retired President De Tonack. Conversation focused on educational and legislative issues in Nebraska. Tonack urged members to consider forming a local retired association and promised to return for more conversation again in 2018.

Two Tabbed for NSEA Posts

Brown, Erickson Fill Board Vacancies

There are two new faces on the NSEA Board of Directors.

Burke Brown, a business teacher and technology director for the Palmyra District OR1 Public Schools has been tabbed as president of the Capitol District, which includes most of southeast Nebraska.

Kimberly Erickson, a fifth and sixth grade orchestra teacher and sixth grade band director at Norfolk Middle School, has joined the board representing the Elkhorn District, which covers much of northeast Nebraska.

Both positions came open via resignations from the board.

Brown has taught for 26 years at Palmyra, where he has been the district's school improvement plan chair, served on the curriculum committee, and most recently was the school representative of the district strategic vision team. He is current local association president and chief negotiator. He represents both his school

district and the NSEA on the Nebraska Information Technology Commission's Education Committee, and chairs the committee's Digital Education Equity Initiative.



Brown



Erickson

Brown earned his education degree and a master's degree in adult education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He recently finished a master's in school leadership from Doane University where he also teaches a graduate course in the counseling program.

Erickson is a graduate of Wartburg (IA) College and earned a master's degree from Northwest Missouri State University.

She formerly taught at Lenox, IA, where she was local association president and served on the negotiations team. She is a past secretary of the Norfolk City Education Association and is current president of the NSEA. She serves on the NSEA Government Relations Committee.

Erickson was the 2016 recipient of the NSEA Teaching Excellence Award, and has also received an NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.



In Charge: NSEA-Retired Vice President Roger Rea, right, poses with NEA Vice President Princess Moss after Rea's selection as President-Elect of the National Council on Teacher Retirement.

Rea to Lead Retirement Council Will Head NCTR in '19

NSEA-Retired Vice President Roger Rea has been chosen president-elect of the National Council on Teacher Retirement.

Rea, a retired Omaha chemistry teacher, was selected at the NCTR annual meeting last fall. He will serve a one-year term as president-elect in 2018 before becoming president later this year.

NCTR serves 68 state and local pension systems representing 19 million active and retired teachers, non-teaching personnel, and other public employees with more than \$2 trillion in trust funds. NCTR's mission is to protect and advocate for retirement security for teachers, educators, and other public plan participants. NCTR also provides training for public retirement plan trustees.

NCTR is now finishing a strategic plan for the next three to five years. Rea will work with new NCTR Executive Director Maureen Westgard and the NCTR Executive Committee to implement that plan.

NCTR lobbies Congressional leaders in Washington, D.C., to assure that federal policies and laws do not harm public employee retirement plans. In recent months, NCTR worked with other organizations to remove the unrelated business income tax (UBIT) provision from the House version of the federal tax reform bill. UBIT would have had an adverse effect on all retirement plans by adding a new federal tax on investment income for public employee retirement plans.

Rea taught for 34 years and is a past president of the Omaha Education Association. He is a past member of the NSEA Board of Directors, a past president of NSEA-Retired, and was Nebraska's 1989 Teacher of the Year. He received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Teaching in 1985 and was one of two Nebraska candidates for the NASA Teacher in Space Project in 1986.

Ernestine Ortiz-Ventura

Ernestine Ortiz-Ventura, 56, died on Dec. 27, 2017, in Omaha. She retired in June after a long career teaching at Gomez Heritage and Castelar elementary schools in Omaha. She had earlier been a K-8 teacher and bilingual director for the West Las Vegas (NM) Public Schools. She was a substitute for OPS at the time of her death.

Ortiz-Ventura was active in the NSEA and the Omaha Education Association. She was a past delegate at NSEA's Delegate Assembly and the NEA Representative Assembly. She was a past association representative for her elementary building, and was a past member of the NSEA Metro District Board of Directors. She was also an avid supporter of the NSEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee and was active in local politics. Ortiz-Ventura was also a lector and usher at St. Mary's of Bellevue Catholic Church.

She is survived by her husband, Eddie, a member of the NSEA Board of Directors; a son, Edward III, as well as 11 brothers and sisters, and many nieces and nephews.

Katherine Elikor

Katherine Ernst Elikor, 87, Overton, died on Dec. 25, 2017, at her home. She was 87.

Born at Hebron, she was a graduate of Lexington High School. She held degrees from Concordia University and the University of Nebraska-Kearney, and taught in Colorado before her election as Dawson County Superintendent of Schools, a post she held for 17 years. She was an active member of NSEA, and held leadership positions over the years. She was also quite active in the Trinity Lutheran Church at Lexington, the Nebraska Association of County Superintendents, and on the board for the Overton Community Center.

Her husband James preceded her in death. She is survived by three children and spouses, eight grandchildren and several great-grandchildren.

Who We Are

NSEA Members are Many Things

NSEA members are many things. Husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, volunteers, caregivers, donors, community and church leaders.

NSEA members have many other characteristics, as well.

We are **teachers** who help children learn to read, write and think.

We are **counselors** who help students solve problems and assist in their preparation for college and vocational programs.

We are **custodians and maintenance people** who keep places of learning clean and safe.

We are **coaches, musicians and artists** who teach children to shoot a basketball, play a trumpet, sing a song and draw a picture.

We are **librarians** who open doors to a world of information.

We are **paraprofessionals and aides** who provide critical assistance to teachers as they teach.

We are **special education professionals** who provide services for children with very special needs.

We are **community college, state college and university faculty** who lead students to levels of learning they might not otherwise achieve.

We are the people who **cook healthy meals** and the **office staff and secretaries** who answer the phones and respond to the needs of students and parents every moment of the day.

We are **college and university students** who aspire to a future working with students daily in our public schools.

We are the **bus drivers** who safely take children to school and back home again at the end of the school day.

We are the **educators** and the **future educators** who love children, the art and science of teaching, and the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to the communities in which we work.

We are Nebraska's education family.

We are the **Nebraska State Education Association**.

Speaking of Education

"No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."

— **Booker T. Washington, Educator 1856-1915**

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

Cooperative Tables

From Joyce J., a second grade teacher:

"My students sit at tables instead of desks. Five students can fit at a table. One end of the table has a sturdy, freestanding shelving unit of three shelves, counting the top. White boards and students' books fit nicely on the shelves. The top shelf has a wire office basket for their journals, and next to it they put their silent reading books. Each table has a small tub with a handle that is used for white board markers, crayons, colored markers, scissors, and glue. A small narrow basket is used for the group's pencils. A table captain is rotated daily and is responsible for getting things on the table for use during the daily instruction. Thirty students fit much better at tables than cramming desks into the room, and co-operative groups are easy to do. I rotate the seating arrangement when it's necessary — at least once each quarter."



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



All About the Numbers: Comparability studies are a big undertaking, but are also of great assistance when a local association goes to the bargaining table. A comp study compares a school district's salary schedule with other, similar, school districts. NSEA's Natalie Thomason, left, is NSEA's comp study expert and worked recently with East Butler Education Association negotiator Sophie Hermelbracht, right, on a comp study for the East Butler members.