

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • January 2026

A YEAR IN REVIEW

**Looking back shows how working
together shapes what's ahead**

- Letter of Intent
Know Your Rights

- NSEA Elections:
Dates & Deadlines

- 2026 State
Policy Agenda



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

Your Seat at the Table

When I was 24, and in my third year of teaching, I started my leadership journey within our association. I ran to serve on our local Board of Directors in Millard, and I was appointed as a member of our negotiations team. That happened, in part, because I was encouraged to run. Nearly two decades later, I now have the privilege of serving as your state president, and it is now one of my primary responsibilities to reach out and encourage my colleagues to run for leadership positions. So at the start of the new year, I am asking each member that reads this column to consider running for an elected office within our union. Whether you decide to be a Building Rep, or run to be able to attend Delegate Assembly, or even serve as an officer of NSEA, we need you.

All of us bring different skills, interests, and passions to the table. That diversity is one of our greatest strengths. But an organization, especially one as member-driven as ours, can only remain healthy if leadership is continually renewed. When our time in leadership comes to an end, there must be others ready and prepared to step forward. Succession is not an afterthought; it is essential to our long-term strength.

Stepping into a leadership role can feel intimidating. Many people worry they are not experienced enough, do not know the "right" procedures, or fear making mistakes in a highly visible role. Those concerns are understandable, and they are exactly why we are launching leadership trainings in six locations across the state this summer. These trainings are designed to give members the tools, confidence and context they need to succeed.

We want more members to feel empowered to run for office, serve on committees and take on advocacy roles knowing they will not be doing it alone. Leadership is learned. It grows through mentorship, practice and shared experience. When we invest in training and development, we invest in the future of our profession and our union.

It can be hard to say yes to these roles. Leadership responsibilities come on top of already demanding jobs in our schools. Time is limited. Energy can feel scarce. The ask is real, and it is not small. But I promise that serving in a leadership capacity is also deeply rewarding. It offers the chance to connect with colleagues across districts, to better understand how decisions are made and to have a direct hand in shaping the direction of our work. It reminds us that we are part of something bigger than our individual classrooms or buildings.

To those who are already serving in leadership roles: thank you. Your work often happens quietly and behind the scenes. The meetings, emails, planning and problem-solving can be invisible to many, and the gratitude does not always come as often as it should. Please know that our organization does not function without you. Your commitment sustains our collective voice and ensures we can continue advocating for educators and students alike.

As we move through the first days of 2026, let's make a collective commitment—to support one another, to grow new leaders and to share the responsibility of this work.

When more of us step forward, the load is lighter, the ideas are stronger, and the future is brighter. Together, let's make this our best year yet.



Classroom Pics (2015)

MEMBER SURVEY RESULTS

Thank You for Sharing—We're Putting Your Feedback to Work

This fall, NSEA's all-member survey generated more than 8,000 comments from educators across Nebraska, providing a clear snapshot of the realities facing the profession. Educators shared candid feedback about working conditions, compensation, long-term career sustainability and whether they see themselves remaining in education without meaningful change. That input did more than identify challenges—it helped clarify priorities and reinforced the importance of advocacy rooted in lived experience.

The survey was sent to nearly 16,000 educators statewide. Their concerns are reflected throughout the adopted 2026 policy agenda. Survey results highlighted persistent issues, including workplace demands, inadequate compensation and a growing disconnect between classroom realities and policymaking. **More than two-thirds of educators say their needs are not considered when elected officials make decisions, with 68% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.** Following the survey, NSEA led an initiative bringing Nebraska lawmakers to classrooms. See the story on page 5.

These insights directly informed NSEA's 2026 legislative agenda and guided collaboration with lawmakers to advance policies that support educators, strengthen public education and address long-standing inequities. Member input remains a critical driver of this work, ensuring the association's advocacy reflects both the challenges educators face and the solutions they believe are necessary to move the profession forward.

See the adopted 2026 policy agenda, page 8.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



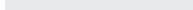
More than half of educators report not having enough time to get their work done.



Four out of five educators say access to paid family medical leave is important to them.



A majority of educators say state incentives are insufficient to retain them in the profession, with 53% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.



76% of respondents report that student behavior significantly affects their day-to-day work.

HOW NEBRASKA RANKS:

AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY

\$60,239¹

#37
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE TEACHER STARTING SALARY

\$38,811²

#50
IN THE NATION

TEACHER PAY GAP

76¢³

MIN. LIVING WAGE

\$65,822⁴

AVERAGE ESP EARNINGS

\$30,408⁵

#43
IN THE NATION

PER STUDENT SPENDING

\$15,896⁶

#26
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE HIGHER ED FACULTY SALARY

\$95,837⁷

#30
IN THE NATION

1. State Rankings, FY 2023-24, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, April 2025

2. NEA Teacher Salary Benchmark Report, FY 2023-24, April 2025

3. Compared to other college-educated professionals with similar experience. Economic Policy Institute, September 2024

4. Income needed for family of one adult and one child to have a modest but adequate standard of living in the most affordable metro area, 2024 dollars, Economic Policy Institute

5. Average K-12 ESP Earnings, FY 2023-24, NEA Education Support Professional Earnings Report, April 2025

6. Expenditure per student in fall enrollment. State Rankings, FY 2023-24, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, April 2025

7. Average Faculty Salary for Four-Year Public Institutions, FY 2023-24, NEA Higher Education Faculty Salary Analysis, April 2025



NSEA-Led Initiative Connects State Senators with Nebraska Classrooms

A collaborative initiative led by the Nebraska State Education Association and fellow education organizations brought more than a dozen Nebraska state senators into public school classrooms across the state. The visits, which took place in November, gave lawmakers the opportunity to observe instruction, shadow educators and engage directly with students to gain firsthand insight into the realities of Nebraska's public schools in 2025.

Participating senators visited schools in communities ranging from the metro area and Lincoln to Platteview Central Junior High School and Hastings. Through classroom observations and conversations with teachers and administrators, lawmakers experienced both the opportunities and challenges that shape daily life in Nebraska schools.

"This initiative gives elected leaders the chance to see, in real time, the extraordinary work happening in Nebraska's public schools," said Tim Royers, president of the Nebraska State Education Association. "We appreciate the senators who made time to listen, learn and engage with the educators and students they represent. Their willingness to step into classrooms demonstrates a shared commitment to strengthening public education in our state."

The senators who participated

in the first year of the initiative include Beau Ballard, Carolyn Bosn, John Cavanaugh, Danielle Conrad, George Dungan, Bob Hallstrom, Rick Holdcroft, Jana Hughes, Dave Murman, Dan Quick, Jane Raybould, Victor Rountree, Ashlei Spivey, Brad von Gillern and Dave Wordekemper. Each spent time in schools within their districts, gaining a closer look at the impact of policy decisions on teaching and learning.

Royers said he was pleased with the strong participation in the program's

inaugural year and noted growing interest from additional lawmakers. "When leaders see our schools up close—when they walk the halls, sit in classrooms, and hear directly from teachers and students—it deepens their connection to the policy decisions they make," Royers said.

NSEA hopes the initiative will continue to expand and become a regular part of how lawmakers engage with educators and students when considering education policy in Nebraska.

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A Year in Photos



A Year in Review, A Path Ahead

Looking back on the past year provides more than a record of accomplishments—it offers clarity about how collective action shapes real outcomes for educators. By reflecting on the association's work, it becomes easier to see how advocacy, member engagement and strategic leadership translate into meaningful change. Understanding what worked, what required adjustment and where momentum was built allows the association to move forward with focus, unity and purpose.

One of the clearest examples of that impact came during the debate over school employee retirement benefits.

Retirement Security

When an early, flawed version of LB645 threatened to reduce state contributions to school employee pensions, NSEA mobilized members to take action. In a single weekend, lawmakers received hundreds of emails and phone calls, making it clear that

educators were paying attention and demanding change. That coordinated effort—member engagement paired with strategic advocacy—resulted in a significantly more equitable version of LB645, a win that is already returning millions of dollars to educators across the state.

As a result of the bill's passage, the employee contribution rate to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems (NPERS) School Retirement Plan was reduced from 9.78% to 8.00% effective July 1, 2025. Because the plan is now over 100% funded, the contribution rate will be further reduced from 8.00% to 7.25% this summer.

These changes represent meaningful, long-term financial relief for educators and reflect the strong funding status of the NPERS plan.

LB645 also reduced employer contribution rates, freeing up additional resources at the local level during salary negotiations.

Collective Bargaining

On average, Nebraska teachers have been able to add more than \$900 to their base salaries, according to NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas. It reflects the steady progress in compensation through collective bargaining and sustained advocacy.

“This work shows how interconnected advocacy and bargaining really are,” Dubas said. “Reducing NPERS contribution rates gave negotiators additional flexibility to push for higher wages and better outcomes for educators.”

While this increase does not fully close the gap between educator pay and that of other professions requiring similar education and responsibility, it represents an important step forward.

Combined with improvements to retirement contributions and benefits, these gains help strengthen recruitment and retention efforts and reinforce the value of investing in



educators as professionals.

Member Advocacy

Much of NSEA's member rights work happens quietly and involves deeply personal circumstances, making progress harder to reflect publicly. Even so, this advocacy remains a critical support for educators facing difficult moments in their careers.

These issues often share common themes across districts—whether related to long-term substitute use, mandatory training or working conditions—but each situation requires an individualized approach, as challenges can vary widely from school to school.

One recent example involves the state's implementation of professional development grounded in the science of reading for educators who teach literacy from age 4 through third grade. This training includes LETRS, a professional learning course for instructors that includes reading, spelling and related language skills.

While ensuring the use of evidence-based instructional practices is an important goal, some districts have

attempted to require teachers to complete this training outside of contracted work hours, effectively without pay, said NSEA Advocacy Director Jason Wiese.

"We've worked with individual members and local associations to address these concerns and help secure equitable solutions that respect educators' time, contracts and professional responsibilities," Wiese said.

Paid Family Leave

During the 2025 legislative session, members were called upon to share personal and compelling reasons for needing paid family and medical leave. Those voices made a difference, helping the legislation earn a priority designation from Sen. Ashlei Spivey.

While paid family and medical leave for educators has not yet been secured, it remains a top priority for NSEA. Member voices continue to play a critical role in advancing this work, helping lawmakers better understand the real-life challenges educators face and why meaningful action is needed to build a stronger, more supportive

education system.

Paid family and medical leave addresses systemic inequities, particularly for early-career educators and women who often face disproportionate barriers due to limited leave options. By reducing the need to exhaust personal leave, paid leave policies help curb burnout, improve teacher retention and promote greater stability in classrooms. In the interim, NSEA continues to advance this work at the bargaining table while collaborating with senators and researchers to build support for policies that strengthen educator well-being and Nebraska's public education system.

A Path Ahead

Together, these efforts demonstrate the impact of sustained advocacy and engaged membership. Each gain builds on shared work and collective purpose, positioning the association to continue strengthening the profession and supporting educators. *See the adopted 2026 policy agenda, page 8.*

2026 Legislative Session Outlook

The second session of Nebraska's 109th Legislature will convene on Jan. 7, opening a 60-day session expected to include numerous proposals with direct consequences for public education. From funding levels to staffing policies, decisions made during this session will shape the day-to-day realities of Nebraska's public schools, colleges, students, and education professionals.

Every decision regarding education is inherently political. Legislative action determines school funding, teaching certificate requirements, class sizes, curriculum standards, instructional resources, and educator compensation. These policies directly affect what happens in classrooms and workplaces across the state.

The NSEA government relations team monitors legislative activity and advocates for policies that protect and strengthen public education. As bills evolve rapidly throughout the session, NSEA works to keep members informed about how proposed legislation may affect their jobs, benefits, and professional responsibilities.

A flagship priority remains advancing LB440, the Education Leave and Support Act, which would provide paid family and medical leave for teachers. Although the bill did not pass in 2025, its adoption could significantly improve recruitment, retention and equity—particularly for early-career educators navigating life events such as maternity or medical leave.

Teacher burnout, low salaries, insufficient benefits, and limited support continue to drive educators out of the profession. Compensation and leave policies often fail to reflect the education, expertise, and responsibilities required. Special education programs are stretched beyond capacity, and rural schools struggle with resources and attracting qualified staff.

Staying informed is essential. NSEA's Capitol Update is sent weekly to your personal email inbox during the legislative session. Subscribe at www.nsea.org/subscriber.

2026 State Policy Agenda

- 1. Provide Paid Family Medical Leave:** Establish a program that provides every Nebraska educator with six weeks of paid FMLA leave.
- 2. Improve Working Conditions:** Ensure teachers have the resources, planning time, and administrative support so students can learn and thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Address burnout by reducing non-teaching duties and expanding support services.
- 3. Revise State Aid to Education Formula (TEEOSA):** Use School Finance Review Commission findings to propose changes that establish equitable and sustainable funding for public education across Nebraska. Guarantee budget deficit remedies don't negatively impact public education funding.
- 4. Increase Educator Salaries and Retention Support:** Advocate for retention grants for veteran educators and education support professionals. Simplify access to existing retention and recruitment grants for early-career educators by making them automatic, requiring no additional paperwork, to attract and retain top talent.
- 5. Expand Classroom Behavior Support:** Advocate for increased state funding and additional programs and policies that prioritize student and educator safety in the classroom.
- 6. Enhance Special Education Services:** Secure additional special education funding, hire paraprofessionals, provide training, and acquire assistive technology to provide critical services, while creating inclusive and equitable spaces for all children.
- 7. Strengthen Early Childhood Education:** Expand access to early learning programs to ensure all children, regardless of background, are prepared for school.
- 8. Support Postsecondary Educators:** Address issues of low pay, job insecurity, and limited professional development opportunities to maintain high-quality instruction in colleges and universities.
- 9. Protect the Diversity of Educators and Students:** Promote efforts to strengthen existing diversity, equity, and inclusion programs by supporting equitable hiring, cultural competency, and inclusive policies that create conditions for all educators and students to close achievement and opportunity gaps.
- 10. Strengthen Certification Pathways:** Guarantee all student teachers in Nebraska receive compensation for their time. Develop alternative pathways for gaining initial certification through district programs and training.



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 - Business Education
 - Career and Technical Education
 - Physical Education
 - Mathematics
 - Social Science
 - Science
 - Early Childhood Special Education (Birth-Kindergarten)
 - PK-12 Reading Specialist
 - K-12 Special Education

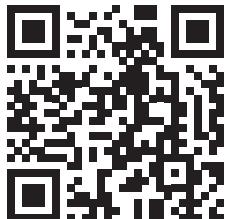
The Master of Education is a blend of theoretical and practical knowledge that can be immediately applied to the classroom setting.



“My professors were understanding while holding me to a high standard. They not only provided me with an invaluable education with skills to use in the classroom but also taught me how to seek out knowledge, learn independently, and never settle for less than my best effort.”

— Kattie

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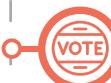
The Nebraska State Colleges are equal opportunity institutions and prohibit unlawful discrimination and harassment. Chadron State College has designated an individual to coordinate its non-discrimination efforts to comply with regulations implementing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies and practices may be directed to: Human Resources, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St., Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-432-6224, Email: hr@csc.edu. CSC has also designated an individual to coordinate the college's efforts to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Inquiries regarding Title IX may be directed to: Title IX Coordinator, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St. Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-430-0980, Email: titleixcoordinator@csc.edu

FILE FOR OFFICE



Jan. 1 -25, members file for state and district offices to be elected during Feb. 6 - March 1 voting.

VOTING



Voting for district officers, NSEA Board, RA At-Large & Cluster Delegates will take place **Feb. 6 - March 1**.

DA CLUSTER DELEGATES



Filing for NSEA Delegate Assembly Cluster Delegates runs **Feb. 17 - March 1**.

NSEA VICE PRESIDENT



Elected at Delegate Assembly. Candidates' campaign materials for delegates are due by **April 3**.

VOTING



Locals with fewer than 26 members will vote for NSEA Delegate Assembly Cluster delegates **March 8 -17**.

LOCAL NSEA DELEGATES



Locals of 26+ members will elect delegates by secret ballot and report verified delegates by **March 20**.

NSEA-RETIRE



Election of NSEA-Retired officers, and delegates to both DA and RA will be by mail-in ballot in **March**.

ASPIRING EDUCATORS



Aspiring Educators members will vote for their NSEA Delegate Assembly delegates at the AE Delegate Assembly on **April 3 - 4**.

NSEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY



April 24 - 25
Election of NSEA Vice President plus Bylaws and 2026-27 Association dues.

REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY



National Education Association Representative Assembly **July 3 - 7**.

ALL NSEA MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FOR DISTRICT OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY AT-LARGE DELEGATES. VOTING WILL BE FEB. 6 - MARCH 1.

ALL MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FOR THEIR LOCAL ASSOCIATION DELEGATES TO NSEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY.

CLUSTERED LOCALS WILL VOTE MARCH 8 - 17. LOCALS WITH MORE THAN 26 MEMBERS, TALK TO YOUR LOCAL PRESIDENT FOR YOUR LOCAL ELECTION TIMELINE.

NSEA ELECTIONS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It is time to consider filing for Association office or as a delegate to the statewide and national assemblies. Elections will occur in the coming months in order to comply with **federal statute which dictates all officers and delegates must be elected by secret ballot**. Here are the details:

NSEA Vice President: 3-year term

Elected at NSEA Delegate Assembly

Candidates seeking this office must declare their candidacy by Sunday, Feb. 15, in writing to the NSEA Executive Director Isau Metes at isau.metes@nsea.org. Alternatively, candidates may mail their declaration to NSEA Elections, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. Candidates are responsible for reviewing the candidate policy guidelines found at:

www.nsea.org/delegateassembly

District Officers: 3-year terms

Deadline to File: Sunday, Feb. 2

Elected during statewide online elections

Each of NSEA's six governance districts includes a set of officers and executive committee members. Officers are elected by members in that district. The term of office is determined by the Bylaws in each district. Members will fill these vacancies:

- Capitol District:** Vice-President and one seat on the executive committee.
- Elkhorn District:** President and two seats on the executive committee.
- Metro District:** Treasurer, Secretary and four seats on the executive committee (subdistrict seats 1, 4, 7 and 10).
- Panhandle District:** President and two seats on the executive committee (areas 1 and 4).
- Sandhills District:** President and two seats on the executive committee.
- Tri-Valley District:** Treasurer, Secretary and two seats on the executive committee (one each from the Central and West sub-districts).

NSEA Board of Directors: 3-year terms

Deadline to File: Sunday, Jan. 25

Elected during statewide online elections

Members in four of NSEA's six governance districts will elect representatives to serve on NSEA's statewide Board of Directors.

The NSEA Board of Directors meets at least seven times each year, and as needed. The board carries out the Association's mission as directed by members at the April Delegate Assembly.

There is one open seat each from the Tri-Valley, Elkhorn, Capitol and two seats from the Metro district. There are no NSEA board vacancies in the Sandhills district (see map on page 11).

NEA RA At-Large District

Cluster Delegates: 1-year term

Deadline to File: Sunday, Jan. 25

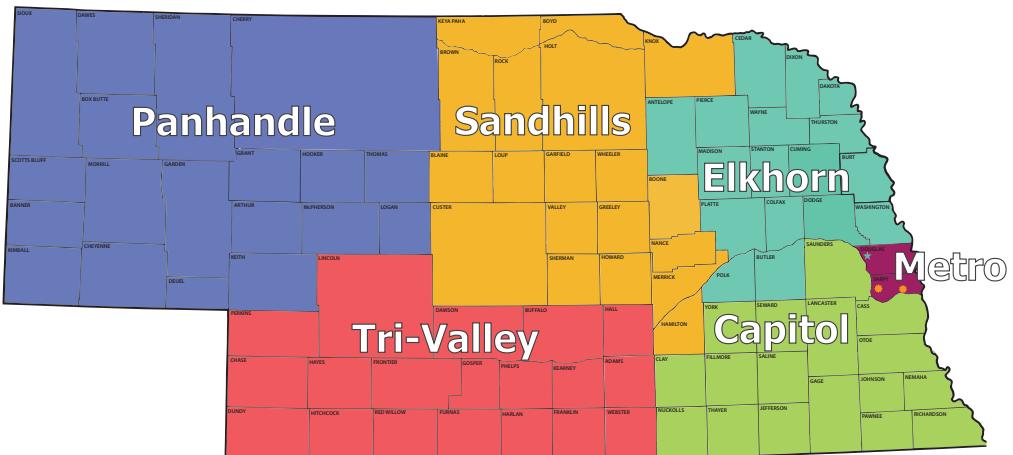
Elected during statewide online elections

The 2026 NEA RA will be held July 3-7 in Denver.

To elect members to serve as voting delegates to the National Education Association's annual Representative Assembly business meeting, **local associations with fewer than 76 members** are grouped in clusters per district. For instance, all local associations in Elkhorn District with fewer than 76 members will vote on a common set of candidates to serve as delegates to RA.

Cluster delegates fund their own RA costs. The exact number of openings will be set after the membership count for 2025-26 is finalized in mid-January, but there are approximately:

- **Capitol District:** 10 openings
- **Elkhorn District:** 9 openings
- **Metro District:** 1 opening
- **Panhandle District:** 5 openings
- **Sandhills District:** 6 openings
- **Tri-Valley District:** 9 openings



In order to comply with NEA guidelines, the Gretna Education Association and Springfield/Platteview Education Association will be included in Capitol District, and Metro Community College Education Association is included in Elkhorn District.

Representative Assembly by filing at nsea.org. Members elected as statewide delegates will be reimbursed for transportation, lodging and meal expenses.

NSEA Delegate Assembly

At-Large District Cluster

Delegates: 1-year term

Deadline to File: Sunday, March 1

Elected during online election by cluster locals per district, March 8-17

To elect voting delegates to NSEA's annual Delegate Assembly business meeting, **local associations with fewer than 26 members** are grouped in "clusters" in each of NSEA's six governance districts. For instance, all local associations in NSEA's Capitol District with fewer than 26 members will vote on a common set of candidates for delegates to DA.

The exact number of openings will be set after the membership count for 2025-26 is finalized in mid-January. There are approximately:

- **Capitol District:** 7 openings
- **Elkhorn District:** 9 openings
- **Metro District:** 1 opening
- **Panhandle District:** 7 openings
- **Sandhills District:** 7 openings
- **Tri-Valley District:** 11 openings

Retired Board of Directors

- **President** (3-year term)
- **Vice President** (3-year term)
- **Capitol District 1** (3-year term)
- **Elkhorn District** (3-year term)
- **Sandhills District** (3-year term)

Delegate Assembly

- **Capitol District:** 4 delegates
- **Elkhorn District:** 2 delegates
- **Metro District:** 5 delegates
- **Panhandle District:** 1 delegate
- **Sandhills District:** 1 delegate
- **Tri-Valley District:** 3 delegates
- **At Large:** 2 delegates

Representative Assembly

- **Metro and Capitol Districts:** 1 delegate
- **Other Districts and Out-of-State:** 1 delegate
- **At Large:** 3 delegates

NSEA Delegate Assembly

Local Delegates: 1-year term

Deadline to File: Set by each

Local Association

Secret ballot elections held at the local association level, with delegate names reported to NSEA by March 20

Delegates from **local associations with 26 or more members must be elected by secret ballot**. Presidents from those associations will be notified of the number of delegate representatives they may elect, based on their local association membership.

Aspiring Educators Delegate to NEA RA: 1-year term

Members of Aspiring Educators will elect delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly at the AE Delegate Assembly on Saturday, April 4. They also will elect region representatives, secretary, president elect and an underclass representative. Watch for the Aspiring Educators newsletter for details on how to attend.

Aspiring Educators members will then elect delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly in statewide balloting following the March AE Delegate Assembly.

NEA RA At-Large Statewide Delegates: 1-year term

Deadline to File: Sunday, Jan. 25

Elected during statewide online elections

Delegates from **local associations with more than 76 members** must be elected by secret ballot, according to federal statute.

Any active NSEA member is eligible to place his or her name on the statewide, at-large delegate ballot for NEA

Shine a Spotlight on an Exceptional Educator



Meet Dina Lado



Lincoln Education Association Member Dina Lado received the Great Plains Milestone Award at the 2025 Delegate Assembly.

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

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

Members can also nominate individuals or groups for these awards:

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

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

Countdown Begins for the 2026 Delegate Assembly

The countdown is on for the 2026 NSEA Delegate Assembly. In just a few months, member-elected delegates from across Nebraska will gather April 24-25 at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel for the Association's 166th Delegate Assembly, led by NSEA President Tim Royers.

The Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting, bringing together members from across Nebraska who are elected by their local associations to represent both large and small, urban and rural school districts. These 23,000 members rely on their delegates to manage the business of the Association, set priorities and help chart the course for NSEA's future.

During the assembly, delegates will participate in keynote presentations, discussions of pressing educational

issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions—all critical elements that guide the work of the Association and shape its advocacy efforts. Members can watch for detailed updates in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The assembly also celebrates excellence in education. Awards presented during the event recognize outstanding professionals, including the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, the Teaching Excellence Award recipient, NSEA's 2026 Friend of Education and additional honors. Full award details, including eligibility and deadlines, can be found in the article below, on this page.

To attend as a delegate, members must be elected by their local

association. Anyone interested in serving should contact their local association president, building or faculty representative, or NSEA organizational specialist to express their interest. Serving as a delegate is an opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the Association, advocate for your peers, and take part in decisions that affect educators and students across Nebraska.

As the state's oldest professional education association, NSEA has held Delegate Assemblies nearly every year since its founding—and in some years, twice a year—to ensure members have a voice in governance and policy decisions. The 2026 assembly promises to continue this long tradition of collaboration, leadership and celebration of educational excellence.

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According to the American School Counselor Association's analysis of U.S. Department of Education Data, to reach recommended student-to-school-counselor ratios, 77,000 additional school counselors will be needed nationwide by the year 2030. On top of that, 40% of public schools indicated it was very difficult or difficult to fill "mental health professional" roles.

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Don't Delay! Apply for 2026 Certificate Renewal Early

Educators who need to renew their certificate in 2026 may want to complete their application early to avoid processing delays with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

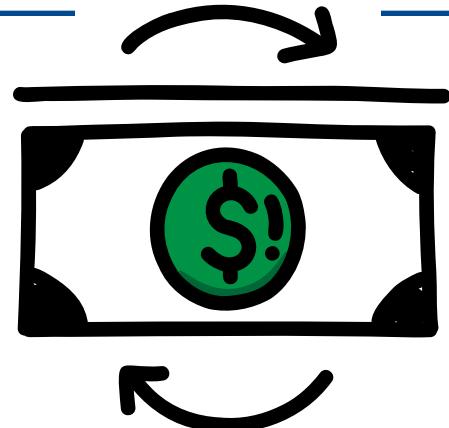
Each year, the NDE sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on Aug. 31 each year. Backlogs at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. In 2024, the department hired additional staff to help manage certificate renewals. This year, the department is encouraging certificated teachers who

will need to renew in 2026 to apply between the months of January and March.

"This will help with the processing time for their certificates and not put them in a bind if they wait until it gets closer to August when our office has many new grads that are working through the system," said NDE Director of Educator Certification Katelyn Larson.

Teachers who are unsure if their certificate expires this year can log in to the Nebraska TEACH portal and check the expiration date: teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense.

To renew, log on to: teach.education.ne.gov/#/ and start an application. The application can be found at the top of the account portal.



IMPORTANT REMINDER

Request PAC Refund by Feb. 15, 2026

NSEA's Political Action Committee is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA dues. Support for the election of recommended candidates is provided by an annual contribution of \$15 from each NSEA member.

Any member may request a refund of those contributions for the current membership year. Alternatively, members may direct the \$15 contribution to be used for bond elections and school ballot issues only.

Refund requests must be in writing to NSEA President Tim Royers. Each letter must be individually composed and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer-generated letters or email messages are not accepted. Each letter must indicate whether all or part of the contribution is to be refunded or designated for ballot issues.

Requests must be postmarked no later than Feb. 15. In order to efficiently use dues dollars, requests for refunds received by the due date will be processed and mailed in a single batch after that date.

Send requests to NSEA President Tim Royers at 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. For questions, email tim.royers@nsea.org or call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

Looking Ahead

Have a student teacher? Gift Aspiring Ed membership!



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

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA-

Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

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

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

more.

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

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

Just1 Kicks Off with New Incentives

To help us continue to advocate for all educators, NSEA asks each local to sign up at least ONE new member between Jan. 1 and Feb. 28. New members who join in January and February will pay the remaining portion of the association year's dues. That's about \$1.50 a day for the remainder of the membership year.

New in 2026!

Sign up members in the first two weeks of January and unlock exclusive incentives for both the new member and their local! New this year, new members who join by Jan. 14 will receive \$50. The new member's local will also receive \$50 to use as they see fit. The breakdown of incentives for NON clustered delegates is as follows:

Full-time members:

- New member receives \$50
- Your local receives \$50

Part-time/ESP members:

- New member receives \$25
- Your local receives \$25

If a local gains enough members to qualify for additional delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly, the local will receive \$250.

Make a Plan

Make a plan for how you will reach out to all potential members. Engage



in one-on-one conversations with potential members. This can be done by matching current members with a potential member they may know or assign building representatives to potential members. Explain the benefits of membership and share your reasons for joining.

Host a member recruitment event, invite

potential members to a local meeting or membership event. If you'd like to schedule a local event, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist ASAP for help in planning.

New members can join online or download an application at www.nsea.org/joinnow. If enrolling with a paper application, please submit it promptly to the NSEA Membership Department via fax, email or U.S. Mail. Enrollment date must be between Jan. 1 and Feb. 28.

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ISAU METES

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The strength of NSEA has always been its members. You are the driving force behind everything we do, and my first priority is to listen—to your stories, your successes and your struggles.

”

Message from the Executive Director

Listening First, Leading Forward

Thank You

As I begin my tenure as Executive Director of the Nebraska State Education Association, I want to start with one simple message: thank you. Thank you for the work you do every day to educate, inspire, and support Nebraska's students. Thank you for your commitment to public education, even in times of challenge and change. I am proud to be a part of this incredible community of professionals who believe in the power of learning.

The strength of NSEA has always been its members. You are the driving force behind everything we do, and my first priority is to listen—to your stories, your successes, and your struggles. I want to hear what matters most to you, because your voice will shape the direction we take together.

Letters From Students

When I think about listening, I am reminded of a moment early in my career. During my student teaching my daughter was ill as a toddler, and I had to miss a day in the classroom. In my absence, my cooperating teacher asked the students to write me letters of advice—things to remember as I entered the profession. Their words were simple but profound: listen to your students, be real, be kind and teach your heart out. That advice has stayed with me, and it will guide me now as I listen to the needs of the organization.

Vision for the Future

Educators face increasing demands, shifting policies, and

growing expectations. But I believe that when we stand united, we can meet these challenges head-on. My vision for NSEA is rooted in three commitments: advocacy, support, and innovation. We will continue to advocate for fair wages, safe schools, and respect for the profession. We will expand resources that help you thrive in your work and well-being. And we will embrace new ideas that strengthen teaching and learning for every student in Nebraska.

This is not just my vision—it's ours. Together, we will build a future where every educator feels valued, and every student has access to a world-class education. That future starts with collaboration. I invite you to share your thoughts, hopes, and concerns with me. Email me or join me at upcoming events. Your input will guide our priorities and ensure that NSEA remains a powerful advocate for educators statewide.

What's Next

In the coming months, you'll see updates on our strategic goals, new initiatives to support members, and opportunities to engage in shaping education policy. But for now, my focus is on listening and learning. Because leadership begins with understanding—and understanding begins with you.

Thank you for all you do. I am honored to serve alongside you, and I look forward to building an NSEA for the future, together.

Let's get started.

RETIRED RECAP



ELECTIONS AHEAD!

Consider running for one of the leadership roles in NSEA-Retired.

Candidate filing for the upcoming elections are available online at nsea.org/retired. Filing deadline is Feb. 5, 2026.

Open Seats

NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities for 2026-27:

NSEA-RETIRED PRESIDENT

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

NSEA-RETIRED VICE PRESIDENT

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

CAPITOL-1 DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

ELKHORN DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

SANDHILLS DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026



A Year in Review: 1. NSEA-Retired members attend the Legacy Educators Advocacy Development (LEAD) Conference in March. 2. Sen. Juarez with members Walta Sue Dodd and Carol Krejci during NSEA-Retired Lobby Day. 3. The annual Spring Conference in April was held at the Strategic Air Command & Aerospace Museum in Ashland. 4. Patsy Koch Johns and Lisa Fricke were awarded the prestigious NSEA Friends of Education Award during the 2025 Delegate Assembly. 5. The Lincoln Education Association-Retired scholarship and grant winners. 6. Nebraska Delegates at the annual NEA-Retired meeting in July. 7. Members Margie Nowak, Arlene Rea and Rita Bennett help at a Halloween Trunk-or-Treat event in October.

Association Roundup



Former Nebraska Teacher of the Year (TOY) winners and NSEA members in attendance at the 2026 TOY Awards Reception and Program in December gather for a photo at the University of Nebraska's Morrill Hall.

On Shoulders of Giants: Celebrating a Legacy of Excellence

December brought a lot to celebrate, including the 2026 Nebraska Teacher of the Year ceremonies at Morrill Hall, a fitting backdrop of literal giants, with honorees spanning from 1981 to now, including the 2026 Teacher of the Year, Sarah Hardin. The month also marked a milestone for NSEA leadership. Trish Guinan retired after nearly 50

years in public education and 29 years with NSEA. She was also honored for her work with the Educators Health Alliance, recognizing her dedication to educators' well-being. Isau Metes became NSEA executive director on Jan. 1, bringing experience as advocacy director and associate executive director. Shauna Benjamin-Brice stepped into the role of associate

executive director, offering expertise in human resources, recruitment, and leadership. Together, they form a capable team ready to protect public education and support educators.

The celebrations highlighted both the excellence of individual educators and the enduring leadership of NSEA, honoring Guinan's service while looking toward the future.

Speaking of Education

“Do not wait until the conditions are perfect to begin. Beginning makes the conditions perfect.”

— Alan Cohen

Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund This Winter



Teachers often go above and beyond, spending their own money to help students in need. But they can't support every child, which is why NSEA created the Children's Fund in 1994.

Donations have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to assist with expenses like glasses, clothing, medical care, fire relief and transportation for students. There is never any red tape or lengthy delay for members wanting to use the fund to help a student. A call to Karen Hunt at the NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. For more information, visit nsea.org/childrensfund.

Apply now for 2026 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2026 application deadline is Sunday, March 1.

Grants are awarded for projects related to improving a local association, development of instructional materials or for staff development for individuals of a local association. Eligible recipients are any NSEA member, group of NSEA members or any NSEA local association.

The application must include an abstract of the project (not to exceed four typed pages) including the following information:

- need;
- how the project will address that need and relate to professional growth goals;
- project description;
- timeline;
- a budget statement; and
- methods of evaluating success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March 1.



Belz

Lynch

Krause

Recipients will be notified in March.

A letter describing and evaluating the project must be submitted by the recipients to NSEA's Scholarship and Grants Committee within three months of project completion.

The grants are named for John Lynch, NSEA's executive director from 1959 to 1974; Paul Belz, executive director from 1974 to 1984; and Helen Krause, NSEA president in 1966 and the first Nebraskan to serve on NEA's Executive Committee.

Further details and the application form can be found at www.nsea.org/BLK. For questions, contact Chris Garcia at 1-800-742-0047 or email Chris.Garcia@nsea.org.

NSEA 150th Anniversary Presents Family of Teachers



Scott & Carla Bobier

When two teachers share a life, teaching becomes more than a career. For Scott and Carla Bobier, it is the foundation of the life they have built together.

Scott and Carla Bobier both work for Bellevue Public Schools. With more than 30 years of combined classroom experience, teaching does not stop at the classroom door. It is a life they share together.

Whether you are part of a long line of educators or just starting your own, Family of Teachers honors families like the Bobiers who inspire and support the next generation together.

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