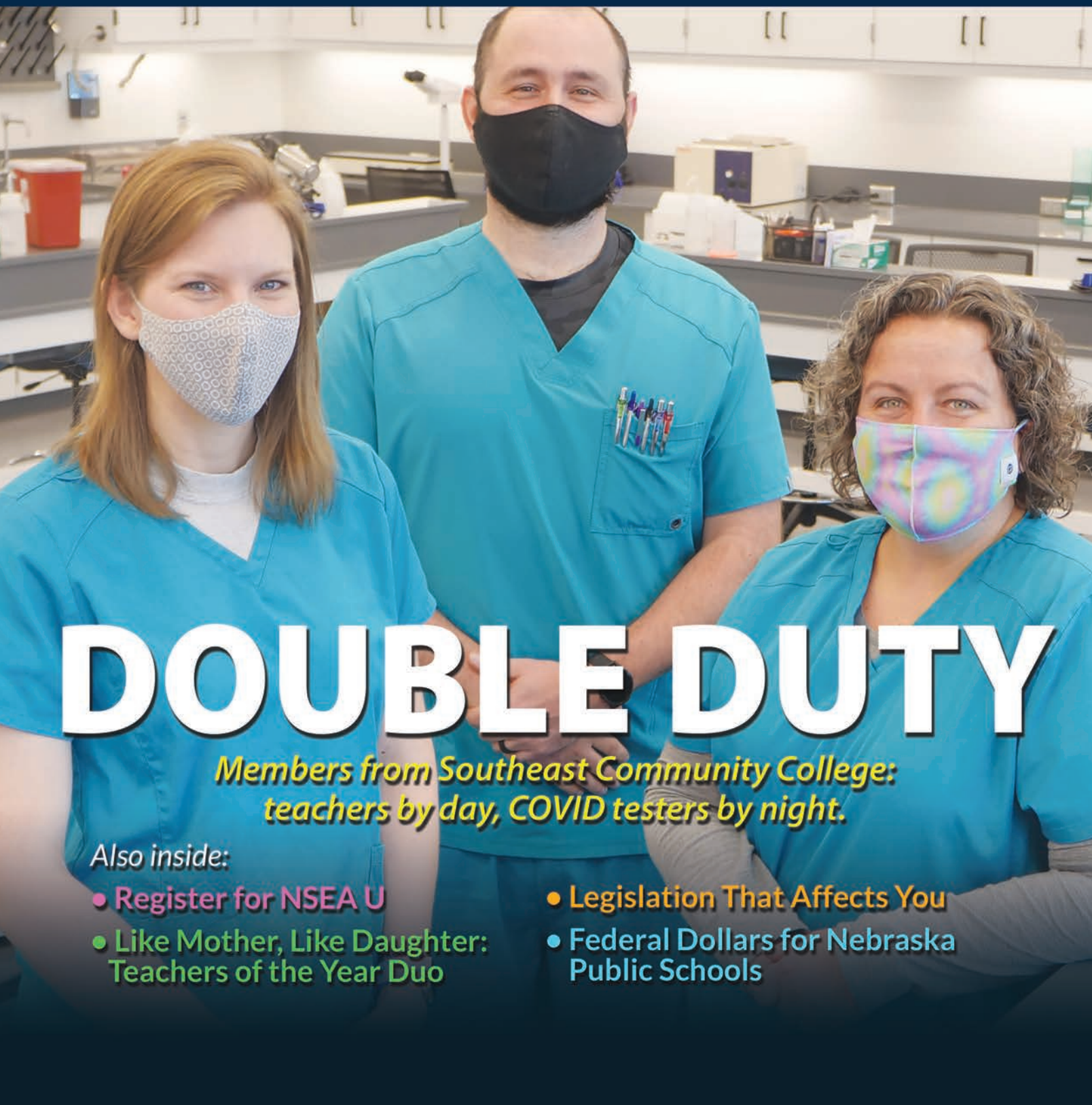


# The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • May 2021



## DOUBLE DUTY

*Members from Southeast Community College:  
teachers by day, COVID testers by night.*

Also inside:

- Register for NSEA U
- Like Mother, Like Daughter: Teachers of the Year Duo
- Legislation That Affects You
- Federal Dollars for Nebraska Public Schools



## THE VOICE

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## A Great Public School for Every Child.

## NSEA Board certifies district elections

Elections for vacancies in leadership positions in NSEA's six governance districts and on the NSEA Board of Directors were held in late February and early March. The NSEA board certified those elections in mid-March. These electees begin three-year terms Aug. 1:

### Capitol District

**NSEA Board:** Megan Simsic, Lincoln  
**Vice President:** Jen Yoder, Lincoln  
**Treasurer:** Nora Lenz, Lincoln  
**Secretary:** Megan Pitrat, Syracuse  
**Executive Committee:** Jake Jolliffe, Lincoln  
**Cluster Delegate to RA:** Megan Pitrat, Syracuse

### Elkhorn District

**NSEA Board:** Vanessa Brand, Oakland-Craig  
**President:** Lisa Hanson, Neligh-Oakdale  
**Vice President:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Executive Committee:** Kristi Rastede, Northeast Community College

### Metro District

**NSEA Board:** Jordan Koch, Papillion-LaVista  
**Treasurer:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Secretary:** Julie Adams, Bellevue, and Michael Fryda, Westside, tie; Fryda conceded to Adams  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 1:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 2:** Lee Perez, Omaha  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 4:** Diana Casey, Omaha  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 5:** Chris Janovec-Poehlman, Millard  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 7:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 8:** Andrew Bowen, Bellevue  
**Executive Committee, Subdistrict 10:** no candidates, no write-in

**Cluster Delegate to RA:** no candidates, no write-in

### Panhandle District

**Vice President:** No candidates, no write-in  
**Treasurer:** Matt Chrisman, Mitchell  
**Secretary:** Shannon Kinsella, Alliance  
**Executive Committee, Area 1:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Executive Committee, Area 2:** Amanda Reilly, Bayard  
**Executive Committee, Areas 3, 4, 7:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Cluster Delegate to RA:** Shannon Kinsella, Alliance

### Sandhills District

**NSEA Board:** Emily Tobias, Sargent  
**President:** Mary Gregoski, Palmer  
**Vice President:** Whitney Hake, Palmer  
**Executive Committee:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Cluster Delegate to RA:** no candidates, no write-in

### Tri-Valley District

**NSEA Board:** no candidates, no write-in  
**President:** no candidates, no write-in  
**Vice President:** Ben Welsch, Hastings  
**Executive Committee-East:** Judy Henning, University of Nebraska at Kearney  
**Executive Committee-West:** Robin Henrichs, McCook  
**Executive Committee-Central:** Stacy Blackmore, Cozad  
**Cluster Delegate to RA:** no candidates, no write-in

### 2020 R.A. At-Large Delegates

**Elected:** Lisa Hanson, Neligh-Oakdale; Jacqelle Lane, Omaha; and Jen Yoder, Lincoln

**Alternates:** Adam Fette, Chadron State College; Alicia Laufenberg, Millard; and William West, Lincoln

## Would you like to write for The Voice?

Would you like to write for *The Voice*? Perhaps an opinion column or an article on what is working in your classroom? Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise teaching-related. Submit your questions about the process and your topics to us at [thevoice@nsea.org](mailto:thevoice@nsea.org).

**On the Cover:** From left, Southeast Community College Education Association members Leah Stamps, Ahmad Tumeh and Lynnett Paneitz have worked at the Test Nebraska facility at CHI Health Saint Elizabeth since last summer. Read their story and COVID-19 experience on page 7.



# Revenue erosion would lead to flood of cuts



**NSEA President  
Jenni Benson**

“

**From 2006  
through 2016,  
nearly four  
dozen legislative  
actions reduced  
state revenues  
by \$509 million.  
Those used to  
be dollars that  
helped fund  
public education.**

”

For decades, Nebraskans have voiced valid concerns about high property taxes.

For just as many years, every Nebraska legislative candidate has voiced these words: “I’m going to Lincoln to reduce property taxes!”

Yet, when the rubber hits the road, when the lawmaking is done, property taxes remain the primary complaint of Nebraska taxpayers.

The problem is that state policymakers have too often played the Little Dutch Boy in reverse. Instead of plugging leaks in the dam that protects the state’s revenue stream, policymakers poke hole after hole in that dam.

## **Redirecting the revenue stream**

This year, senators are considering LB364, which offers dollar-for-dollar tax credits to corporations and the wealthy in exchange for donations those entities make to private school scholarships.

Dubbed the “Opportunity Scholarships Act,” the bill simply gives the wealthiest Nebraskans an opportunity to evade their fair share of taxes and avoid paying for the great work of public schools.

LB364, as introduced, is projected to cost the state revenue stream \$10 million the first year and could grow to \$100 million each year by 2030. That’s a massive hole in the dam.

That dollar-for-dollar benefit does not extend to other causes. If it’s such a great idea, why doesn’t it apply to donations to cancer research, homeless shelters or other worthy recipients?

This “poking of holes” is not new, and it has cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars over the past 15 years.

In 2007, LB456 gave a tax credit to subchapter S corporations, costing the state revenue stream \$3.6 million. In 2012, LB40 changed a sales tax exemption for health clinics and cost the revenue stream an estimated \$2.8 million. Also in 2012, a property/sales tax exemption for data centers in LB1080 cost the state \$4.1 million. From 2006 through 2016, nearly four dozen legislative actions reduced state revenues by \$509 million.

Those used to be dollars that helped fund public education. Now, they’re staying in the pockets of wealthy Nebraskans instead, while schools are struggling.

## **Two bad bills don’t make a good one**

Meanwhile, the legislature offers little in the way of legitimate property tax reform. Senators now face a false choice: Pass LB408, or pass LR22CA, both of which harm local government and drastically reduce local control.

LB408 places onerous revenue restrictions on all local governments, not just school districts, by way of state statute. It caps the annual increase in property tax revenue at 3% unless otherwise

allowed by a vote of local patrons.

That cap applies to all political subdivisions, like cities and counties, which in turn limits funding for police, fire and rescue departments, libraries, parks, community colleges and public schools. For schools, this would be on top of the existing \$1.05 levy lid *and* the 2% school budget growth cap.

Our election systems are not nimble enough to accommodate repeated special elections to override the cap. When schools are already under such tight restrictions, another lid would interfere with the ability to effectively educate the next generation of students, leaders and community builders.

LR22CA puts essentially the same harmful restrictions in place, only it writes them into the state constitution.

Once in the constitution, it will be difficult – if not impossible – for future legislatures to alter or remove it.

While LR22CA might go to the ballot, it simply should not and will not pass citizen muster. Three times in the past 25 years Nebraska voters decisively defeated such “lids on kids.” That makes it clear that Nebraskans believe local spending is a purely local issue. The faux urgency attached to LB408 makes it a false choice.

Policymakers must accept that, in most instances, local governmental bodies are excellent stewards of the public dollar. They scrimp, they save, they cut corners and make do. The locally elected board members of these entities live in the communities they serve. They pay the same taxes as their neighbors. They know full well that every tax dollar must be spent wisely. All of these agencies are already under spending lids of some kind – and Nebraska schools are under spending lids *and* a levy limit.

## **Fixing the dam**

These policymakers must also accept that there is a revenue problem. Particularly with school funding, the state is not providing its share. Since 1990, Nebraska has consistently ranked 48th or 49th in the nation for the amount of state support for K-12 funding. Nebraska schools received only 37.7% of their revenue from the state in 2018-19.

Meanwhile, for K-12 public schools in Iowa, that number was 55.1%. Imagine what another \$650 million in state aid to K-12 schools would do to Nebraska property taxes. That’s roughly the number it would take to get to 55% state funding, as found in Iowa.

Until legislators stop poking holes in the dam that protects the state’s revenue stream, increasing state aid will be a difficult fix. Likewise, until state leaders understand the issue is a state aid problem, property tax relief will be difficult to find. One thing, however, is clear: LB408 and LR22CA are not the answer.

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# It's back! NSEA U in-person July 13-15

Three days of fun and learning are waiting for you this summer. Explore the Lincoln Children's Zoo, hear from one of TIME Magazine's most influential people and laugh at some of education's most relatable moments, all while networking and developing your professional skills.

NSEA will host its annual NSEA University July 13-15 at the Nebraska Innovation Campus in Lincoln. Registration is open now!

## Bakari Sellers

Bakari Sellers made history in 2006 when, at age 22, he defeated a 26-year incumbent to become the youngest member of the South Carolina legislature and the youngest African American elected official in the nation.

Since, Sellers has worked to address issues ranging from education and poverty to domestic violence and childhood obesity.

He was named to TIME Magazine's 40 Under 40 list in 2010, as well as the 2014 and 2015 "The Root 100" lists of the nation's most influential African-Americans. He plans to release his first book, "My Vanishing Country," in May and is a political commentator on CNN.

Sellers will join members via Zoom during the Tuesday, July 13, luncheon for a presentation and Q&A session.

## Gerry Brooks

Educational humorist Gerry Brooks will take center stage during the Thursday, July



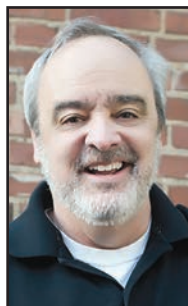
Sellers



15, lunch. Brooks, a full-time elementary school principal in Lexington, Kentucky, has parlayed short, humorous videos into internet sensation status by drawing on his experiences as a classroom teacher and intervention specialist. He shares his thoughts on Flair Pens, Smarkers, Carpet Time and more. He has written two books: "Go See the Principal: True Tales from the School Trenches" and "If You Give a Teacher an Assignment."

## Lincoln Zoo Tour

Tuesday, July 13, will feature an evening reception and NSEA U-only tour of the Lincoln Children's Zoo. State senators will be invited, too. The zoo opened in 1965 and now includes more than 400 animals and a miniature railroad. It is home to more than 40 endangered species and recently added giraffes and a red panda to its ranks. The endangered Sumatran tiger and threatened Galapagos turtle also reside at the zoo.



Brooks

## Professional Development

Dozens of professional development sessions will focus on self-care, year-round membership, social and racial justice, student engagement, retirement, building capacity within your local, bargaining, health insurance, and other opportunities for members.

Presenters will be from education associations all over the state, as well as the Nebraska Department of Education, Norby and Welding Law Firm, NEA staff, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska, Educators Health Alliance and NSEA staff.

## Registration

Registration for NSEA U is open to members only. Please register by July 1.

The Annual Financial Report training sessions will be offered July 13 and 15. Comp Study Training will be July 13 (for experienced negotiators) and July 14 (for new negotiators). Analyzing Prevalence will be July 15. Registration for these three sessions must be complete by June 21 so NSEA can provide accurate information for each participating local association.

Those wishing to participate in the zoo tour may bring their families along and must sign up by June 30. A zoo registration link will be sent upon receipt of NSEA U registration.

There is no cost to attend NSEA U or the zoo tour. Members may request mileage reimbursement from home to the event each day for those who live 60 miles or less from the venue. For those who are eligible to voucher a hotel room (61 or more miles from the venue), mileage may be paid from home to the venue and back.

For more information or to register, go to [www.nsea.org/NSEAU21](http://www.nsea.org/NSEAU21).

## Personal email account a must for educators, members

The line between personal and professional life gets blurred sometimes, especially when it comes to email. While it is convenient to communicate with just one email account, you might want to think twice before casually chatting over school email.

Your school email is district property. That means no one from the district needs to ask your permission to review any emails you have sent or received. This is also the case for any district-issued technology such as laptops or tablets.

Email and technology are not subject to work day hours. It does not matter whether you are "on" or "off-the-clock." The district owns the property 24/7.

Your personal email, cell phone or computer are not district property. The district does need your permission to access these accounts and devices.

Depending on your school board policy, negotiated agreement and/or staff handbook, the use of personal communication and personal devices may be restricted to outside the contract day.

Consider the following when using school email:

- Are you saying anything disparaging about students, colleagues, administration or the school board? If so, use your personal email on a personal device. Make sure you are sending it to the recipient's personal email.
- Are you saying something political? Refrain from sending anything promoting or disparaging about ballot measures or political candidates (anyone from city council to the U.S. president).
- Are you saying anything you would want to be private? Be aware that at any time someone can review and read all communications from your school email.

NSEA highly encourages all members to create a personal email account through a non-school platform, such as Gmail or Hotmail to conduct personal and association business. Learn how to set up a personal email account at [www.nsea.org/email](http://www.nsea.org/email). If you have questions or concerns about personal communication and your rights, call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.

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**Testing 1, 2, 3:** Pictured from left, SCCEA Members Leah Stamps, Ahmad Tumeh and Lynnett Paneitz stand in a blood science lab at the Southeast Community College Health Sciences building in Lincoln.

# SCCEA members behind scenes at Test Nebraska

Simply watching the COVID-19 pandemic sweep across Nebraska was not an option for three Southeast Community College instructors, especially when they knew they had the knowledge and training to help solve the problem.

SCC Education Association and NSEA members Lynnett Paneitz, Ahmad Tumeh and Leah Stamps put their medical lab certification to use when Test Nebraska began ramping up COVID-19 testing in April 2020.

Paneitz directs SCC's Medical Laboratory Technology program. She teaches immunohematology, or blood banking, as well as phlebotomy (drawing blood) and clinical education courses. She is SCCEA president and has been with the college for more than 10 years.

Tumeh is a clinical chemistry instructor and teaches laboratory methods and phlebotomy. He's been with the college full-time for two years and part-time for another year prior.

Stamps has been at SCC for three years, teaching courses in hematology (blood diseases) and hemostasis (making bleeding stop).

All three are certified by the American Society for Clinical Pathology.

### An opportunity to help

The Test Nebraska lab came under the direction of CHI Health Saint Elizabeth hospital in Lincoln last spring. Its director contacted Paneitz, looking for students or lab instructors who might be able to help process COVID-19 tests. Paneitz put out the call, and the three submitted their applications.

Since getting hired at Test Nebraska, they

and dozens of others have kept the lab running 24/7 – each working up to 35 hours a week over days, nights and weekends to get test results back to patients quickly.

"It was really nice to be able to give something to what was going on in the pandemic instead of just my opinion," Paneitz said.

### The science behind the tests

The three did not collect samples from patients. Instead, they were behind the scenes at CHI Health Saint Elizabeth, processing the tests and analyzing the results using a process called PCR: polymerase chain reaction.

"It takes a little piece of DNA and it multiplies it so that it can be detectable," Stamps said.

The samples go into a centrifuge, where the spinning separates and amplifies the DNA. A fluorescent reaction then shows what they're looking for.

"It's not like we're just looking for a virus. We're looking for a specific piece of DNA," she said.

The test yields a number, and that number indicates a positive or negative test.

The PCR process is different from a rapid test, which looks for the antigen, or a protein from the virus, instead of the person's DNA. If a rapid test comes back positive, a more sensitive PCR test can confirm the result.

The PCR samples are processed 92 at a time, and the lab can get through about 15 cycles in a shift.

"It was kind of a slow start and then we hit this mega peak," Paneitz said. "In a 24-hour period we were doing 4,000-7,000 patients."

### Staying relevant

Their families have been supportive of the extra shifts they've taken on at Test Nebraska in addition to working their regular hours at SCC. The days can get long, but the tests still need to be processed.

"I've been here (at SCC) since 8 o'clock, and then once I leave here, I go to Saint E's," Stamps said. "I'll be there until 9:30 in the evening, so it's a full day. Then, I wake up and I go back to work tomorrow."

For Stamps, knowing she's contributing in a positive way during a time of global uncertainty makes it worth it.

"It's nice to say, 'hey, during this time years ago, I helped out.' It's just us doing a little piece of something for the community," she said.

The three agreed COVID-19 has spotlighted the medical lab industry.

"Everyone was talking about, 'Where's the test? Where's the test for COVID?' Then finally it gets developed, but we need someone to run those tests," Tumeh said. "That's where it comes down to how much we need lab techs. The best thing you could do for the community was to help produce accurate results."

"It's also nice for students to see their teachers giving back, but also out there working in the field," Paneitz said. "It keeps us relevant."

The trio said it was good to know Nebraskans' tests were being processed in Nebraska by local people at a local lab.

"It was a good opportunity to put our little mark on what has generally been a pretty terrible time," Tumeh said.

## You could be the 2022 Teacher of the Year

In 2022, one teacher will represent the good work of all Nebraska teachers as the Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Application forms are now available through your administration or at the website listed below. Teachers may nominate a colleague or self-nominate.

Applications must be postmarked by midnight (CDT) Aug. 11, 2021. A panel will review applications, and up to five finalists will be selected for interviews in August. The 2022 recipient will be recognized in November 2021.

Since 1972, the Nebraska Teacher of the Year program has recognized outstanding certified teachers in a pre-K-12 classroom setting who plan to continue in active teacher status in a state-approved or accredited school.

A two-minute public speaking video is required. The application seeks information on educational background and personal development, community involvement, philosophy of teaching and learning, and commentary on the teaching profession.

The Teacher of the Year will maintain a regular teaching schedule while also participating in a year of professional learning through the National Teacher of the Year Program, speaking at various functions such as the Administrator Days conference, Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association conference and the NSEA Delegate Assembly, and participating in workshops and school programs across Nebraska, the National Teacher of the Year Washington Recognition Week in Washington, D.C., the weeklong International Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, and the weeklong National Teacher of the Year Program Next Steps Conference in Princeton, New Jersey.

The NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska Association of School Boards, corporate partners Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska and Data Recognition Corporation, and the State Board of Education present cash awards or grants to the Teacher of the Year and other finalists.

For additional details, go to [www.education.ne.gov/toy](http://www.education.ne.gov/toy).

Those interested may reach program coordinator Lora Sypal at (402) 471-5059 or [lora.sypal@nebraska.gov](mailto:lora.sypal@nebraska.gov).



**Two Generations:** Megan Helberg (left) earned the Nebraska Teacher of the Year honor in 2020. Her mother, Sue McNeil, held the same title in 1995.

## All in the family:

### Mother-Daughter duo of McNeil, Helberg earns Teacher of the Year honors across different decades

Megan Helberg has always wanted a spacesuit, just like her mother, Sue McNeil's.

"I remember when my mom went to space camp and she got her own space suit, with all the NASA stuff on it, and it said her name on it. I wanted that. I went through this whole astronaut phase," Helberg said.

McNeil has treasured that spacesuit since 1995 – the year she attended space camp as one of her duties as the Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

It wasn't in the cards for Helberg to do the same, though. She had her sights set instead on the pharmacy field.

Then, something changed.

"One day I came home from the pharmacy and thought, 'I respect this profession, but it's just not really where I see myself long-term,'" Helberg said.

She realized she loved reading, learning, expressing herself through writing and being around people.

"I could just see her really shining as an educator," McNeil said.

Twenty-five years later in 2020, 10 years after switching career paths, Helberg got the chance to represent Nebraska as the Teacher of the Year. She has taught at Burwell for 11 years, but will return to her alma mater, Loup County in Taylor, this fall.

McNeil and Helberg are the only known parent-child duo to have both earned the honor.

#### From hospital to Capitol

"When they came into my classroom and surprised me, I said, 'I wish my mom and dad could be here,'" Helberg said.

The award committee didn't know who her mother was, until Helberg mentioned her name.

"I have a different last name and we didn't teach at the same schools. I think it was neat that they didn't know we had any sort of connection," Helberg said.

Helberg's experience accepting the honor was much different from her mother's. While Helberg held the title during a pandemic, she reflected on her own experience when McNeil won during a time of intense family stress.

"I remember when my mom got it. There I was, 10 years old, and my dad was in surgery for his heart transplant," Helberg said. "We were down there (at the University of Nebraska Medical Center) for 62 days, and that is when my mom found out she was Teacher of the Year."

"It was a pretty emotional roller coaster," McNeil said. "I had to leave my husband in the



ICU to go to Lincoln for the ceremony, and I was quite nervous about that. But it was nice to have something really positive going on in my life while we were going through the traumatic heart transplant surgery with Tom.”

“When you’re 10, you see things through a pretty different lens. Now that I’m an adult, I can’t imagine how she kept it all together for our family and at school and just carried on being amazing in all of her roles,” Helberg said.

### **TOY in a pandemic**

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Helberg didn’t get to experience everything that came along with the title – and the Teacher of the Year has a lot of responsibilities.

They participate in the year-long National Teacher of the Year professional learning program; speaks at functions throughout the state including the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association conference, Administrator Days and the NSEA Delegate Assembly; joins in workshops across the state; and attends the National Teacher of the Year Washington Recognition Week in Washington, D.C., the weeklong International Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, and the weeklong National Teacher of the Year Program Next Steps conference in Princeton, New Jersey.

“It’s hard not to be a little bitter about how everything went down with COVID because we got to have one gathering together before COVID,” Helberg said, “but they have said it’s not over. They’re going to try to do a couple of trips for us when it’s safe to resume traveling.”

McNeil said the Teacher of the Year program has evolved and improved over the years. When she held the title, all the state Teachers of the Year attended space camp and went to Washington, D.C., to meet President Bill Clinton together, but those were the only times they interacted with one another.

Now, they’re split into cohort groups for activities all year long and beyond.

“They get to spend a lot more time with each other, sharing best practices and being with other really great teachers from different parts of the country, and I think that’s a wonderful thing,” McNeil said. “I think that makes you a better teacher to be exposed to other ideas and what’s working in other states.”

### **Learning by example**

Helberg had her mother as a social studies teacher for six years at Loup County Public Schools in Taylor. McNeil taught junior high and high school.

“I got to see her in action and really, truly learn from one of the best,” Helberg said. “She was ahead of her time, as far as project-based learning.”

Every year, McNeil involved her students in a project that would enhance or improve the community in some way.

“I really admire my mom because she brought in this element of service to your community. She brought in an element of ‘hands-on,’ which became very popular 20 years down the road,” Helberg said.

McNeil made an effort to separate her school life and her home life, something Helberg said she tries to mimic.

“Teachers kind of have this sense of, ‘Oh, I’m a teacher. That’s my whole life. That’s everything about me,’” Helberg said. “But then I always think, ‘What if something happens and you’re not a teacher anymore, and your whole identity is wrapped up into that?’ Yes, being a teacher is a large part of me, but that’s not all of me. I’m very open about that with my students, that I have other areas of interest and other things that I like to pursue.”

### **‘Raise it all up’**

Both McNeil and Helberg said it’s often difficult for teachers to put themselves out there when it comes to receiving accolades, but they encouraged other teachers to apply for Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Even if they don’t win, they’ll learn something new.

“Go for it,” McNeil said. “The process of the application really is a way to help you figure out what kind of teacher you are. The questions are very difficult, and you really have to do a lot of thinking... ‘Where do I stand on this? How do I feel about this?’ It helps you be a better teacher just by going through the process.”

“It made me more aware of some of my strengths and made me aware of some of my weaknesses,” Helberg said.

Helberg quickly learned that all the other Teachers of the Year from other states felt the same way.

“It’s not about ego and it’s not about inflating your own status. It really truly is about learning as much as you can and then bringing that back,” she said. “Once you learn to just be confident in yourself and that you do belong, it’s about your entire school and your entire community and how you can raise it all up.”



**A Family Affair:** Megan Helberg (center) celebrates with her mother, Sue McNeil (left), father, Tom McNeil (right) and husband, Dan Helberg (back) at the 2020 Nebraska Teacher of the Year banquet.

## **Join the Conversation on Race and Belonging**

NSEA’s Conversations on Race and Belonging is back this summer as a virtual six-session program that uses the podcast, “Seeing White,” and the book, “Night Flying Woman” as its touchstones. The sessions are designed to encourage participants to improve their personal racial understanding based on self-examination and awareness. The program builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation and storytelling.

Sessions are 2.5 hours and will run weekly on Wednesdays beginning June 9, from 3 to 5:30 p.m. These sessions are open to all members of NSEA, MNEA and SDEA.

Participants will have the opportunity to gain empowering skills to initiate meaningful conversations on race and to approach such opportunities as bridges into relationships and connections with others. These skills will be incorporated into each session, as well as outside of the sessions, with friends and family. All assignments, including the podcasts and videos, generally run less than one hour. Sessions include many opportunities to journal or take notes, so be sure to always come to the sessions with pen and paper. The format will include pair shares, small group work and full group work. Since the pandemic hit last year, this program has moved to a virtual format. While participants may join the Zooms on a smartphone, a computer is encouraged to make shared material more easily visible.

Applications are being accepted now and will be closed for selection on May 20. To apply, go to [www.nsea.org/Conversations](http://www.nsea.org/Conversations).



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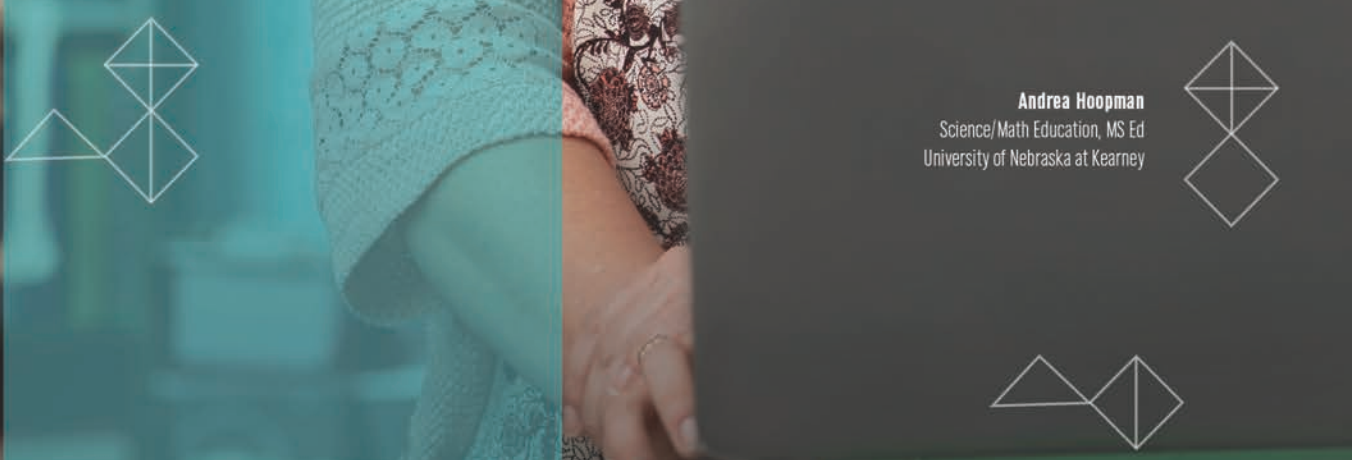
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# College takes chance to keep students on track

## COVID pandemic causes Northeast dean to reimagine drafting

Dr. Wade Herley and his colleagues had just three options when the threat of COVID-19 forced their drafting students off the Northeast Community College Campus last spring: one, that students didn't finish the course; two, that every student be required to go buy an expensive computer in order to participate from home; or three, that the college loan out more than \$120,000 worth of equipment.



**Herley**

They chose the third.

Herley is Dean of Business and Technology at NECC in Norfolk. He's also a member of NSEA – rare, since he works in administration. Part of his job is overseeing the architectural, structural and mechanical drafting courses.

Those courses require students have access to special software for 3D modeling, like AutoCAD, which requires a high-end computer and monitor setup to run properly.

"So the pandemic hits and we are stuck with a lot of very expensive computers in the classroom with a lot of very expensive software," Herley said. "There was a real possibility that with everybody at home, they wouldn't be able to complete the semester."

Not finishing the course would throw students out of sequence with other classes, which could set them back more than a year, Herley said.

### Timing is everything

In less than a day, he and his colleagues decided the only option that was good enough was to send all that expensive equipment home with the 30 drafting students.

"We had no time to ask. If we went through our normal channels, it takes weeks and months, and we had a day," Herley said.

When the question came up about who would be responsible if equipment was lost or broken, Herley raised his hand.

"It was me," he said.

Each student received two high-definition monitors, a desktop computer, a mouse, a keyboard and all the cables that went along with them.

Herley and his team – Associate Dean of Business and Technology Shawn Tillotson, then drafting instructor Lynnette Frey, office



**A Rough Draft:** Northeast Community College sent \$120,000 worth of computers and drafting software home with students when the COVID-19 pandemic hit last spring.

assistants, other faculty and members of the IT department – carefully considered the potential outcomes.

Then, they tore apart the computer labs. They wrapped the monitors in bubble wrap, loaded the components onto carts and wheeled them out to students who were waiting at the curb in their cars to take the equipment home.

"It was so surreal. We're running down the hallway with these carts and wiping them down, because we just didn't know what this all meant, so we're wiping everything down. We're using tons of hand sanitizer," Herley said. "We checked out a lot of computers and did it in a short amount of time."

### A software blip

Herley said one of the draws of a community college is that such technology is provided for students.

"Our programs are efficient. They're affordable for students. They don't have to buy a \$4,000 computer and \$4,000 worth of software. We take care of that," Herley said.

They found a way to continue to provide that during the pandemic, but there was one more problem: the software wasn't going to work once students got the computers home.

"It was enterprise software, where it had to hit our system and validate through our system to work, and that's much different than a system that you have on a computer at your home," Herley said.

The IT department made calls to "jailbreak" the software and make it usable as a standalone product on 30 different computers.

"IT Services did a pretty heavy lift, and

they did it awfully quick," Herley said. "They have priorities that they have to deal with every day, and they dropped those and put our students first to make that happen."

### A new way to connect

Herley said it wouldn't have felt right to leave campus and do nothing, knowing students would otherwise go home and not make any progress toward their degrees the rest of the spring.

"We just had to do it. To the credit of the college, nobody freaked out that we had \$120,000 worth of equipment just go out the door," he said. "We got it all back," minus one monitor that was dropped on its way back to the lab.

It cost just \$164 to fix.

Northeast also helped some students find reliable internet connections to handle virtual classes. Herley credited several local internet carriers who either increased broadband speeds or temporarily let students have service free of charge.

"I look back on it now, and I'm pretty proud of everybody that was involved because it wasn't, 'I've got to get out of here.' It was 'How do we take care of our students?'" he said.

The pandemic brought with it new opportunities in remote learning that Herley said Northeast and many other colleges will continue to use going forward, even when a full return to face-to-face classes is possible for everyone.

"Online will not take over what we do, but it will enhance some areas," he said. "It's that extra tool in the toolbox. We wouldn't have gotten to it without the pandemic, so there's some good that has come out of it."

# NSEA takes stance on priority legislation

NSEA staff and leadership have sifted through more than 600 bills introduced in this legislative session. Those listed here are NSEA's top priorities to promote a strong economy, strong public schools and strong families. Bills with an \* were named priority bills by senators. NSEA supports or opposes each of the bills below.

## CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM

### -Support-

**LB136** changes procedures regarding short-term suspension of students, providing the same due process rights to students facing short-term suspension as those facing long-term suspension.

**LB143\*** requires the state to give notice to school districts regarding changes in child placement or emergency placement.

**LB154,\*** an NSEA bill, requires school districts to track student discipline by type of offense, type of discipline and demographic information.

**LB198** changes provisions relating to the Student Discipline Act and clarifies that students charged with discipline violations must be allowed to complete class work and homework.

**LB281\*** as amended requires child sexual abuse prevention instructional programs for school students and staff.

**LB322\*** adopts the School Safety and Security Reporting System Act, requiring the Nebraska Department of Education to establish a statewide, anonymous reporting system to reduce risk and violence related to schools. The Safe2HelpNE report line will be available 24/7 via phone call, text, web form and email free of charge. Alerts received by trained professionals will be sent to law enforcement or a threat assessment team.

**LB359** mandates all school districts to incorporate multicultural studies into all programs at the elementary, middle and secondary levels, with assistance from a full-time multicultural education consultant at the NE Department of Education.

**LB518,** an NSEA Bill, amends the Student Discipline Act to prohibit surreptitious (or secretive) electronic surveillance on school property or during school activities, including remote learning.

**LB568,\*** a bill NSEA was involved in creating, changes provisions relating to the court's jurisdiction and excessive

absenteeism.

### -Oppose-

**LB452\*** adopts the Financial Literacy Act as amended, which requires each Nebraska school district to develop a financial literacy curriculum. NSEA opposes the bill, as financial literacy concepts are already included in the most recent social studies curricula.

## SCHOOL FINANCE

### -Support-

**LB132\*** creates the School Financing Review Commission, a 16-member board tasked with studying the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act, which determines the amount and distribution of state aid money schools receive.

**LB361** provides state aid to educational service units for core services (approximately \$12.5 million per year for two years) and technology infrastructure (approximately \$3 million per year for two years).

**LB473** creates a \$3 million fund under the Nebraska Department of Education to fund requests made by school districts facing extraordinary increases in their special education obligations. Unspent money shall be invested by the state. The bill notes that special education costs can be unpredictable for school districts and can change dramatically from year to year as students with varying needs join or leave the school district.

### -Oppose-

**LB 2\*** reduces the valuation of agricultural land and horticultural land for certain school district taxes, making the taxable percentage less on land taxed for school purposes than for other purposes.

**LB364\*** adopts a dollar-for-dollar income tax credit for individuals or corporations that contribute to a scholarship fund at a private school, diverting public tax dollars from public schools.

**LB408\*** would statutorily limit the annual increase in property tax revenue for schools and all other local political subdivisions to 3% unless otherwise allowed by a vote of patrons. The bill mirrors LR22CA, which writes the same provisions into the state constitution.

**LB432\*** changes state income tax rates beginning in January 2022.

**LB644\*** adopts the Property Tax Request Act as amended,

combining LBs 165, 214, 291, 292, 466, 521 and 613. The bill outlines the procedures a political subdivision must follow in order to increase its property tax request, if that request will be higher than the prior year's request.

**LB681** adds elementary and secondary schools to the Nebraska educational savings plan trust, allowing users to bypass paying taxes in order to pay for private school.

**LR11CA,\*** a constitutional amendment, enacts a tax on the purchase of services and new goods except fuel, beginning in 2024. It prohibits some other forms of taxation, including on personal and corporate income, personal and real property, inheritances, estates, and some retail goods and services.

## PROFESSIONALISM AND EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

### -Support-

**LB258\*** requires employers to offer "safe time" for employees for absences related to domestic abuse, domestic assault, sexual assault or stalking, allowing employees to seek mental, physical and legal aid without fear of loss of employment.

**LB260\*** adds caring for a family member with a serious health condition to a list of "good cause" for voluntarily leaving employment under the Employment Security Law.

**LB529,\*** an NSEA Bill, changes





distribution of lottery funds used for education, adding \$1,000 student teacher loan forgiveness, up to \$270 for students to cover Praxis Core test fees and training for educators to spot potential mental health issues and refer students for help, among other provisions.

**LB108\*** increases the gross income limit from 130% to 185% of the federal poverty level, allowing families to earn more money without losing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

**LB117** adopts the Hunger-Free Schools Act, which provides public school students with breakfast and lunch at school at no cost to families.

**LB396\*** adopts the Nebraska Farm-to-School

Program Act, which matches elementary and secondary public and nonpublic schools with Nebraska farms to purchase locally produced and minimally processed food for school meals and snacks.

**LB400\*** allows audio-only telehealth services and allows a patient to give verbal consent for treatment during a telehealth consultation as long as written consent is given within the following 10 days.

**LB527\*** begins providing transition services to students with special needs at age 14 rather than age 16.

**LB87** provides for mental health first aid training for school districts receiving an innovation grant.

**LB247\*** creates a task force of legislative committee chairs and state commission representatives to coordinate a statewide mental health hotline in conjunction with local and federal resources.

**LB487\*** prohibits any health insurance plan from setting rates for telehealth treatment of mental health conditions at a higher rate than for in-person services.

**LB642** reimburses school districts and educational service units up to 80% for qualifying mental health expenditures.

**LB5** adopts the Purple Star Schools Act, which designates a school staff member as a military point of contact and establishes a student-led ambassador program to ease transitions for incoming military families.

**LB378** requires the Commissioner of Education to report financial information related to expenditures, revenue and other categories, including special education, by Sept. 1 each year.

**LB137** requires, rather than allows, early childhood educators to report their educational degrees, professional credentials, training and work history.

**LB485\*** changes the income requirements to receive child care assistance.

**LB640** offers school districts incentives to provide quality early childhood education programs by increasing the current state aid reimbursement from 60% to 80%.

**LB64,\*** an NSEA Bill, phases out the state tax on Social Security over a five-year period.

**LB147\*** transfers management of retirement systems for Class V schools to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems.

### **-Oppose-**

**LB684** allows public school employees to join or terminate membership in a labor organization at any time unless otherwise specified in a contract.

**LB210** allows home-schooled

students to participate in a public school's extracurricular activities with no course enrollment in that school.

## **PANDEMIC-RELATED**

### **-Support-**

**LB323** ensures that the amount of state aid funding a school district receives through the Tax Equity and Educational Opportunities Support Act will not be affected by a pandemic, even if school expenses temporarily decrease because of a closure.

**LB630\*** provides for a study of the efficacy of commercial air filters in classrooms.

**LB641**, an NSEA bill, adds education support professionals to existing legislation that requires school districts to continue to pay teachers' salaries when a school closes because of widespread illness or an epidemic.

## **YOUTH REHABILITATION AND TREATMENT CENTERS**

### **-Support-**

**LB273\*** changes language regarding facilities that can be used as YRTC facilities and appropriate location of juvenile care.

**LB428\*** entitles juveniles at youth rehabilitation and treatment centers to receive an appropriate educational equivalent to opportunities offered in public schools.

**LR25\*** creates the YRTC Oversight Committee, extending the work of a similar committee appointed in 2020.

## **ADDITIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED**

### **-Support-**

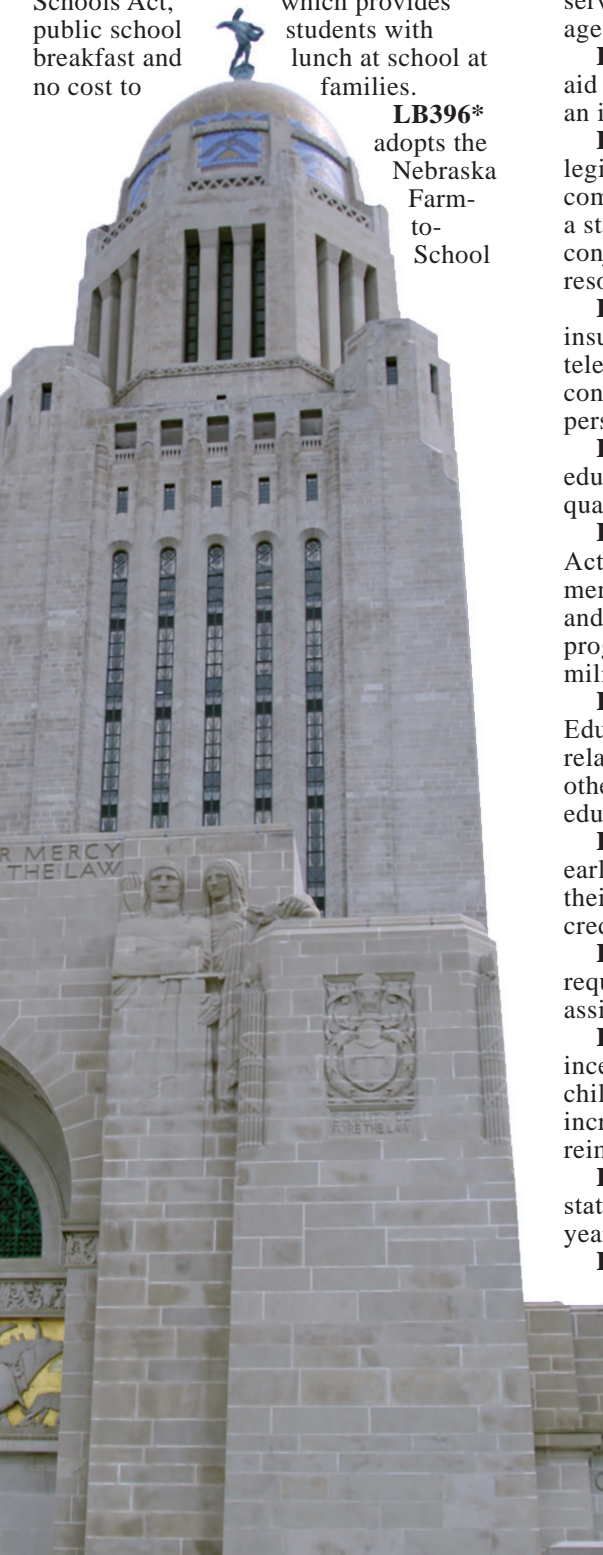
**LB338\*** authorizes the Public Service Commission to redirect funding for broadband services.

**LB388\*** adopts the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Act, granting up to \$20 million in grants to expand connectivity services across the state.

**LB451\*** includes characteristics associated with race, culture, and personhood in the definition of race, including hair texture and protective hairstyles under the Nebraska Fair Employment Practice Act, and changes provisions relating to unlawful employment practices.

## **WEEKLY CAPITOL UPDATE**

Stay up-to-date with legislative decisions that affect public education. Receive weekly updates about legislative activity in NSEA's Capitol Update, sent to your personal email inbox each week of the session. Subscribe to the Capitol Update at: [www.nsea.org/subscriber](http://www.nsea.org/subscriber).



# A fight for life, to be a teacher

By Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska

Forty-five years ago, Barbara Saathoff wasn't sure she would be able to walk again or see her children grow up – much less get her degree in education. Now, the NSEA member is celebrating 29 years as a high school science teacher.

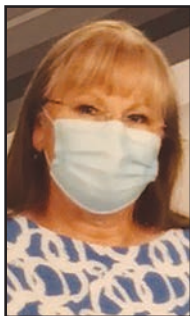
Saathoff's story took a dark turn in 1975. She was in her early 20s – a newly single mother of two children under age 4, in good health – when she suddenly lost feeling in her feet, hands and, soon, entire body.

Unable to speak or even close her eyes, she was hospitalized for weeks in Springfield, Illinois, before finally being diagnosed with Guillain-Barré Syndrome, a rare autoimmune disorder where one's immune system attacks the peripheral nervous system.

Saathoff was mentally present, but fully paralyzed for five months. Weighing only 72 pounds (up from 48 at her lowest point), she went home in a wheelchair at the mercy of her parents, who were also now raising her son and daughter. They had to carry her most places because accommodations for handicapped people were so limited.

"They said I'd never walk again and weren't sure I'd survive," Saathoff said. "I told God I wouldn't want to live like this. I wanted to see my children grow up. I wanted to be a teacher."

Saathoff slogged through physical, vocational, occupational and speech therapies with her parents' support



Saathoff

and walked into a follow-up appointment a year later. "I want to see you do that again," the doctor said. From then on, I never stopped pushing," she said. As soon as she could, Saathoff started college. Upon graduation from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1991, she bought herself a blue topaz and diamond ring – a symbol of the birthdays she hadn't expected to see and the strength she had to survive and pursue education.

She went on to earn two master's degrees in curriculum and Pre-K-12 administration; has taught high school science for nearly 30 years in Dorchester, Lincoln, Columbus and now Schuyler; and still wears that blue topaz ring today.

"It's not a job when you love what you do," said Saathoff, a proud recipient of the Cooper Award for Excellence in Teaching and Alltel Outstanding Teacher Award.

She got to see her two children – and now six grandchildren who all live in Nebraska – grow up. She was also able to return years of favors by taking care of her dear mom and dad before

they passed away.

Saathoff's health journey hasn't been without its continued challenges. Residual pain and nerve damage are a constant struggle. She's had 10 surgeries – on her hands, feet and appendix, to name a few. Because of her history with GBS, Saathoff is unable to safely receive a COVID-19 vaccine and has spent the last year in particular fear of the virus. Fortunately, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska has been there for her for more than 40 years.

"People need to know that if you have [BCBSNE], you don't need to worry about what [illness] you have because they're beside you," Saathoff said.

See more stories like this – and share yours – at [NebraskaBlue.com/YourStory](https://NebraskaBlue.com/YourStory).

## BCBS launches EHA Population Health

Educators Health Alliance members who have health coverage from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska now have access to EHA Population Health, including a team of nurse health coaches. These coaches can help you live a healthier, happier life and lower your health care costs. Learn more at [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop](https://NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop).

## EHA insurance coverage for NSEA-Retired

Public school retirees, ages 50 to 64, who have been insured through the Educators Health Alliance for five years immediately prior to their retirement can continue their EHA coverage through the EHA Direct Bill Plan. Current premiums and deductible options can be found on the EHA website at [www.ehaplan.org](https://www.ehaplan.org).

Beginning Sept. 1, 2021, participants no longer will be required to pay a separate Special Services fee in order to be eligible for the EHA Direct Bill plan.

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# Virtual DA: Take two a success

After an abbreviated Delegate Assembly quickly turned virtual last spring, a second year of virtual DA went off without a hitch in 2021. Nearly 200 delegates took part in the DA April 23-24. Members heard a keynote address from author Ted Dintersmith, a State of the Association address from NSEA leaders, approved a host of resolutions, bylaw changes and new business items, and set dues for the coming year.

## What School Could Be

Author and speaker Dintersmith addressed the assembly Friday night, offering his perspective on the priorities that should drive education.

He said most schools are focused on teaching students to memorize material, replicate procedures and follow instructions, which doesn't always lead to success in the real world.

He toured schools in all 50 states, produced a film and wrote a book highlighting the ways students could be taught to be more creative.

"We are losing so much along the way. We are losing curiosity, audacity, empathy. When kids are 4 and 5, 98% of kids test at the genius level for creativity. When we're adults, it's 2%," Dintersmith said.

He encouraged educators to give students the freedom to pursue their passions, not just teach what will be on a test.

"Let's start with the world that our kids will be adults in and work backward," he said.



**Dintersmith**



**Executive Team:** NSEA's executive team consists of (from left) Vice President Robert Miller, President Jenni Benson, and NEA Directors Linda Freye and Tracy Hartman-Bradley. The team led the 2021 virtual Delegate Assembly from the association's headquarters in Lincoln.

food banks throughout the state to support families were all key this past year, Fennell said.

Changing rules in the Nebraska Legislature also affected the association's work.

"We hope that some of the legislation that we're working on with state senators today can solve some problems for folks in the future," Fennell said.

## Elections

The assembly elected Edward Ventura of the Omaha Education Association to represent the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee for a three-year at-large seat on the Board of Directors. It also elected Adam Fette of the Chadron State College EA as the Higher Education at-large representative.

## 2021-22 Dues

Following a virtual budget hearing on April 22, delegates on April 24 set member dues for 2021-22 at \$421, a \$5 or 1.2% increase over the prior year. Dues have increased only \$64 total over the past 12 years.

## Resolutions

Delegates approved five new or amended resolutions. They are:

**Nutrition:** The Association believes that no student shall be denied the opportunity of a school meal or be publicly identified or stigmatized for needing free or reduced meals or the inability to pay a school meal debt.

**Selection and Challenges of Materials and Teaching Techniques:** The Nebraska State Education Association believes that democratic values can best be transmitted in an atmosphere that does not restrain free inquiry and learning. The Association also believes that quality teaching depends on the freedom to select materials and techniques. Teachers and school library media specialists must have the right to select and use materials and techniques without censorship. The Association deplores pre-publishing censorship, book-burning crusades, and attempts



**State of NSEA:** Association President Jenni Benson, left, and Executive Director Maddie Fennell address delegates virtually April 23.

## State of the Association

Delegates heard from NSEA President Jenni Benson and Executive Director Maddie Fennell about NSEA's work during the past year. The two focused on how the association supported educators and students through COVID-19.

"Everyday, as you know in your classroom, things were changing on a dime, and we had to work with that as well," Benson said. "We also had a lot of things going on in the world in relation to social and racial justice. Your leadership, your elected officials, we have all been working on your behalf this year."

Whether it was designing and delivering professional development, hosting Conversations on Race and Belonging, or working on a member rights case related to COVID-19 leave, the Board of Directors, committees and staff stayed busy serving members.

Surveying member thoughts on returning to learning safely, airing Teacher TV on News Channel Nebraska and donating to

to ban books from school library media centers and instructional materials. Educators must have the opportunity to research instructional materials and resources that would be made available to all students. Challenges to the choice of instructional materials and techniques must be orderly and objective, under procedures mutually adopted by professional associations and school governing boards.

**Indigenous People's Day:** The NSEA believes that the history of colonization needs to be recognized and acknowledged. To do so, the Association believes that the name of the current holiday known as "Columbus Day" should be renamed and recognized as "Indigenous People's Day" in recognition of the early indigenous peoples that were living in the United States before colonization by European settlers.

**Hair Discrimination:** The Association believes that it is important to eliminate discrimination in the workplace or schools against individuals wearing natural hairstyles such as braids, twists, cornrows, and locks. The Association believes that wearing natural hairstyles is a human right.

**Membership Participation:** The NSEA believes that every member has the right and obligation to participate fully in the Association. The opportunity to participate should be without fear, intimidation, discrimination, harassment, retribution and/or any forms of bullying.

### New Business Items

Delegates approved seven new business items, all of which call for NSEA to take action during the 2021-22 association year. Based on these items, NSEA will:

- apply to the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles for a specialty license plate to celebrate public school educators;
- develop a proposal for enhanced support for education support professionals through peer mentoring, submitting the proposal to NEA for funding;
- research opportunities for educators to receive high-quality professional development in cultural proficiency, social justice and racial justice and include findings in the strategic plan;
- create a standing committee focused on student and educator health and safety, working to provide education, member training and legislation development toward that goal;
- develop guidelines for taking official NSEA positions on legislation when two NSEA affiliates are not in agreement on specific bills until the two NSEA affiliates have made formal statements regarding pending legislation;
- form a diverse statewide task force to review and refresh the NSEA strategic plan, looking specifically at the current NSEA governance structure and presenting a detailed report to the 2022 Delegate Assembly; and
- convene a committee to study frameworks that promote equitable discipline for students with special needs and racially diverse groups in Nebraska public schools.

## Guest Column

# Making it through year one

## Support important for early career educators

Dear New Teachers,

It is year six for me, and I thought at this point I would have it all figured out. Honestly, I'm happy to say that I'm not ready to quit teaching at the end of this school year, which means that I have once again beaten the national statistics about new teachers quitting in their first 5-7 years. However, not being ready to quit doesn't mean the journey has been smooth. If this year's pandemic has proven anything, it is that the work teachers, administrators, support staff, and schools do is more important than anyone could have ever imagined.

Survey after survey, poll after poll, various entities have been scratching at the surface as to what we want and need as teachers. While this past year enlightened the world to the needs of not only the students but also our faculty and staff, many needs are still unaddressed regarding our early career educators. I know what I wanted in my first year and still want in my sixth year: validation for my triumphs and support for my struggles.

Validation is key to building the confidence of new educators. The first year is the year you learn what you're really made of, and you'll be tested emotionally, physically, and pedagogically. In that chaos, the glimmers of light come from the validation you receive. I have found that simple, genuine words and praises can make a difference in someone's day, especially during these trying times with a pandemic and political upheaval.

New teachers, celebrate every success you have because you are doing something that matters and changes lives daily. Beat yourself up less and love yourself more because you matter, and yes, this job is hard because the outcome is beautiful.

Support is key to growing and staying within this profession. We went from having massive support in college during our classroom experiences to being dropped in a classroom on our own. A wealth of knowledge has landed into unknown territory, and it is frightening and exciting. However, new teachers are drowning all over. For some, their first year of teaching was virtual this past year, and many supportive and nuanced moments that happen within that first year were lost due to not being in the building with coworkers. Additionally, not every school district has the capability or the funding to have an effective mentor program. We in the education field need support across the board if we want to be successful.

New teachers, step out, ask questions, and make connections. Find your people and use them. This can be one of the hardest, most imperative things you'll do in your career. We cannot survive and thrive alone. Those you seek will give you guidance, and you have much to offer them in return. You are not new and useless; you are new and useful. Give yourself a little credit.

Thanks to COVID-19, I've been put in a reflective state, and I realized something: a large chunk of my professional happiness comes from the relationships with my students. My relationships have kept me going in the good times and the bad times. I value my relationships with my students more than my content, and for an English teacher, that is truly saying something. My students mean more to me than I ever thought imaginable, and they know that I sincerely love them. They remind me every day why I am here. While I may fight against and address the issues in education, I look at my students and appreciate them for reminding me why I love my profession, and why I am fighting. Some days, my students are the ones who support and validate me the most.

New teachers, this job becomes a career the moment you remember your "why." Validate and support one another, and more importantly, validate and support yourself. You're doing great. Keep going.



Carlson

Sincerely,  
Rae Carlson

*Rae Carlson teaches English at Niobrara Public Schools. She is a member of the Niobrara Education Association.*





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\* For those interested in school-based mental health careers



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# Member Benefits introduces NEA Mental Health Program

NEA Member Benefits began piloting an important new benefit Feb. 24 in response to members' requests for a stress management solution.

The NEA Mental Health Program is designed to help members address the considerable mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and other stressors present in their lives.

Offered in partnership with Sanvello Healthcare, the NEA Mental Health Program is an evidence-based mobile app care solution created by clinical experts that enables members to access on-demand help for stress, anxiety and depression. The Sanvello app currently has over 3 million users.

The NEA Mental Health Program is available to members, spouses/domestic partners and eligible dependents in all 50 states.

The program consists of three main options, as follows:

■ **Sanvello Free Self-Care Solution** – Access to a number of tools including a Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy-based “Feeling Better” guided journey to learn techniques that help with stress, anxiety and depression. Other tools include: meditation, assessments, hope boards, goal tracking and communities



to connect anonymously with other like-minded individuals. Users must be age 13 or older to use this solution.

■ **Sanvello Premium App** – Access all of the free components mentioned above, as well as enhanced tools including additional CBT-based guided journeys. Available at no cost for one month, and thereafter at a 25 percent discounted rate for direct-to-consumer subscribers (discounted cost is \$6.75/month or \$40.49/year). This option is available to

individuals age 18 or older.

■ **Sanvello Coaching** – Access to all Premium App services, plus coaches virtually support users on their journey to feeling better through one-on-one messaging and personal support, as well as live group video sessions. Coaching staff are available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Eastern time. Direct-to-consumer subscribers to Sanvello Coaching receive a 10 percent discount at a cost of approximately \$45/month or \$315/year. This service is available to individuals age 18 and older.

The NEA Mental Health Program provides bilingual (English, Spanish and French) customer support through email at [info@sanvello.com](mailto:info@sanvello.com), which is monitored Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eastern time, with responses within one business day.

NEA Member Benefits is excited to offer this new mental wellness benefit to NEA members at a time when such support is badly needed.

Visit [www.neamb.com/mentalhealth](http://www.neamb.com/mentalhealth) to learn more about the NEA Mental Health Program. Contact Moumita Bhattacharya, Manager, Branding and Product Marketing, at [mbhattacharya@neamb.com](mailto:mbhattacharya@neamb.com) with questions.

## Seven ways to save money all year long with NEAMB

NEA members have two advantages when it comes to making their money stretch as far as possible: educators are natural researchers who love to discover the smartest ways to save money, and membership in the NEA means you have access to a wide variety of money-saving benefits provided by NEA Member Benefits.

### Shop NEA Discount Marketplace

At the NEA Discount Marketplace, you can find discounts from thousands of well-known retailers. When you make purchases, you'll earn cash back via check or PayPal.

The online shopping program has exclusive deals for NEA members. It's updated regularly, so check back often to see what you can save on everything from dining certificates and clothing to housewares and electronics.

### Save on travel

You'll find great rates on hotels, flights, cruises and more by making reservations through NEA Travel. Need a rental car? NEA Member Benefits offers member-only deals at the biggest rental car companies such as Enterprise, National, Alamo, Dollar and Hertz.

### Buy and insure a new car

Start your comparison-shopping process with the NEA Auto Buying Program. Log in through [neamb.com](http://neamb.com) to see available discounted prices as you browse makes and models.

You'll find hassle-free deals from TrueCar-screened dealerships near you. NEA members have seen an average savings of \$3,026 off MSRP on new cars.

After you've bought your car, NEA Member Benefits can help you save further on auto insurance and an extended auto warranty. NEA members save an average of \$423 on car insurance via the NEA Auto and Home Insurance Program provided by California Casualty.

### Save on magazines

When you order magazine subscriptions through the NEA Magazine Program, you can choose from more than 800 magazines at up to 85% off the cover price. Select your magazine now and be billed later.

### Protect your pet

Plan ahead with the NEA Pet Insurance Program, backed by Pets Best Insurance. Some surgical procedures can

cost thousands of dollars, but when you have pet insurance, your vet bills can be affordable. Pet insurance plans typically include reimbursement for emergency visits, lab tests, prescriptions, exams, hospitalization, surgery and more. Plans start at less than \$1 per day, plus NEA members are eligible for a 5% discount (available in most states).

### Save on gifts

As an NEA member, you get a 20% discount on the entire 1800Flowers.com family of brands. Choose from flowers, wine, chocolates, snacks, meat, seafood and more from stores such as 1800Flowers.com, 1800Baskets.com, Cheryl's, Harry & David, Simply Chocolate and more.

### Save on cell service

Get reliable wireless service for less through AT&T, the only national unionized wireless carrier. As an NEA member, you'll receive a 15% discount on monthly service for qualified rate plans, plus 20% off select wireless accessories. Family members are also eligible, so your whole family can save.

Visit [www.neamb.com](http://www.neamb.com) to access each of these services and member-exclusive discount programs.



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# Educator input required to get relief dollars



**Executive Director  
Maddie Fennell**

“

We know that if educators and other key stakeholders are not at the table, those resources may not be spent in a way that provides the greatest impact on accelerated learning and systemic renewal as we move past COVID-19.

”

School districts across the state have the equivalent of a winning lottery ticket in their pocket. Thanks to Congressional action, Nebraska will receive \$887 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds.

A brief overview of these funds is below, but it is first important to note that the biggest part of this legislation, the American Rescue Plan Act, requires school administrators to seek input from educators on how the funds should be spent before receiving any money.

The U.S. Department of Education requires that the application include information on how the State Educational Agency “consulted with stakeholders and the public, including students, families, civil rights organizations including disability rights organizations, school administrators, superintendents, and educators

and their unions, and provided an opportunity for and incorporated, as appropriate, input in development of its ARP” plan.

That means OUR VOICE must be at the table when funds are being distributed.

This historic legislation provides the resources to help put in place the effective measures needed to keep students and educators safe. It also makes extraordinary investments that will lift countless children and families out of poverty and works to address the immense inequities that affect the most vulnerable students and communities of color.

We know that if educators and other key stakeholders are not at the table, those resources may not be spent in a way that provides the greatest impact on accelerated learning and systemic renewal as we move past COVID-19.

Money allocated IN MILLIONS	CARES 3/20	CRRSA 12/20	ARPA 3/21	Total
SEA (State Dept. of Education)	\$6.5	\$24.3	\$54.5	\$85.3
LEA (Schools)	\$58.5	\$218.8	\$491	\$768.3
GEERS (Governor)	\$16.4	\$17		\$33.4
Total	\$81.4	\$260.1	\$545.5	\$887

## What’s in the bills?

Congress has passed three bills that address funding for schools to combat COVID-19 impacts. NSEA will invite local leaders and negotiators to a call with state leadership and staff on May 4 to learn more and ask questions. The three bills are as follows:

- March 2020: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)
- December 2020: Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, (CRRSA Act)
- March 2021: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP Act)

These bills separate the funds into three basic categories:

- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds **for the state**. ESSER I, ESSER II and ESSER III funds correlate with the three bills listed above.

- ESSER I, ESSER II and ESSER III funds **for local education agencies (schools)**.

- Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Funds are available in the CARES and CRRSA Act and may be used for emergency grants to local education agencies, institutions of higher education or any other education-related entity as designated by the governor. They are GEER I and GEER II.

The CARES Act provided \$58.5 million in ESSER I funds to Nebraska districts for technology, closure-related costs/staffing and response/supplies for COVID-19. That

money can be obligated between March 13, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2022. In addition, the Nebraska Department of Education was allocated \$6.5 million in ESSER I funds to use for statewide initiatives in technology and resources, curriculum and professional development.

GEER I funds of \$16.4 million were used to address equitable access challenges. Devices and systems were purchased for public, non-public and exempt school students.

The CRRSA Act provided an additional \$218.8 million in ESSER II funds for schools, \$24.3 million in ESSER II funds for the state, and \$17 million in GEERS II funds for Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS). The obligation period for these funds is March 13, 2020, to Sept. 30, 2024.

The ARP Act provides approximately 2.2 times as much funding as CRRSA through ESSER III. While the calculations per school district will not be available until May for ESSER III, school districts in Nebraska will receive \$491 million, and the state will receive \$54.5 million.

In addition, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) is part of ARP and will provide nearly \$40 billion in grants to higher education institutions around the country. The allocations per institution are determined by the number of Pell Grant recipients with full-time enrollment.

## How can the money be spent?

ESSER funds have many allowable uses including:

- any use authorized under ESEA, IDEA, Title II, Perkins Career and Technical Education Act or McKinney Vento;
- coordinating preparedness/response efforts of local education agencies;
- addressing needs of marginalized or disadvantaged student populations;
- training/professional development;
- purchasing educational technology;
- providing mental health services and supports;
- providing meals to eligible students;
- summer learning and supplemental after school

programs; and

- other activities necessary to maintain the operation of the school and employ existing staff.

The CRRSA Act offers these additional allowable uses:

- address learning loss (unfinished learning);
- school facility repairs/improvements that reduce the risk of virus transmission; and
- improving indoor air quality of school facilities.

While many school districts and the state have already allocated ESSER I and GEERS I funding, many are still determining how to spend ESSER II and III dollars. For specific amounts allocated to your district, guidance can be found at [www.education.ne.gov/cares-act](http://www.education.ne.gov/cares-act).

## Apply for secretary seat on NSEA-Retired board

NSEA-Retired is looking to fill its secretary role, as current Secretary Ruby Davis recently won a Metro Board seat on the Retired Board of Directors.

The NSEA-Retired Bylaws state:

“Vacancies, except for the office of the President, shall be filled by majority vote of the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors for the remainder of the terms affected.”

The term will run from Aug. 15, 2021, to Aug. 15, 2022.

Interested Retired members are asked to contact President De Tonack by writing to 2315 Dodge Street, Lincoln, NE 68521 or [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com). Interested members should provide their education and association history, and state why they would like to serve on the board. Questions may be directed to Tonack at (402) 525-4264.

The deadline to apply is June 1, 2021.

## 1, 2, 3...Ballots tallied March 25



**Election Complete:** NSEA-Retired President De Tonack (right) hands a stack of ballots to NSEA staff associate Rebecca Smith. Seven staff helped the Retireds count almost 1,500 NSEA-Retired election ballots on March 25 in the NSEA board room.

## Highstreet shares gift through instruction, tractors

Barb Highstreet has nearly covered the age spectrum during her teaching career. Kindergarten, upper elementary, junior high, high school and college students all have been touched by her gift of teaching.

Now, she has shifted her focus to a different generation – older adults who want to learn watercolor painting.

Highstreet graduated from Chadron State College in 1970, then earned her master's degree and an art endorsement from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

She taught third and fourth grades in Valentine and Beatrice from 1970 until moving to West Lincoln Elementary in 1976. From there, she taught third grade and then kindergarten through sixth-grade art at Belmont Elementary in Lincoln. From 1990 to 2007, she was an art teacher at Holmes Elementary, also in Lincoln, working with young artists in kindergarten through fifth grades.

Over the years, she formed her own tutoring company, Club Z Tutoring.

“At one time, I had over 50-60 families and about 30 or more tutors. We tutored students in math and reading, both elementary and high school,” she said.

Highstreet also worked part time for Bright Lights, a nonprofit that offers hands-on summer camps for middle school youth to discover more about science, art, cooking, theater and more. She served as the Classroom Assistant Coordinator and taught summer classes.

In 2002, Highstreet became the coordinator of the program's international component when it expanded into a partnership with students at Senshu Matsudo University Junior High School near Tokyo, Japan. She traveled to Japan in 2003 as part of a



**About a Tractor:** NSEA-Retired member Barb Highstreet shows one of her watercolor tractor paintings.

Fulbright teacher exchange program and has coordinated the Bright Lights International program ever since.

When Highstreet retired in 2007, she worked as a student teacher supervisor at Doane College (now Doane University) in Crete until 2018.

Then, she decided it was time for something new.

“I started teaching older folks in their 60s and 70s watercolor painting,” Highstreet said. “I have mostly educators. Most of them are the people in my circle of friends.”

These painters have become some of her favorite people with whom she spends her time and shares her talent.

“This is one of the most rewarding parts of my life,” Highstreet said. “It is so enjoyable to give them the tools to paint when they think they can't.”

She herself loves to paint images of tractors, but not just any tractors: those that belong to the people she loves.

“It isn't because I have a love for tractors, grew up on a farm or have even ever ridden on one, but because of the people who own them and love them,” Highstreet said.

In the last couple of years, Highstreet has completed nine tractor paintings.

“After I have finished the tractor, it becomes a gift to them or their family,” she said. “It is the people that brings my love of tractors alive.”

**Have you started a new adventure or hobby? Share details with us by sending your story to NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com).**



## Chadron gets creative with members, potentials



**Paint and Sip:** The Chadron City Teachers Association held a Paint and Sip event for members and potential members on Feb. 20. Seven members and two potential members attended. The event was funded through a New Ed local membership grant from NSEA, which paid for a spot in the class, canvases, instruction and snacks. Each person brought their own drink of choice for the fun and relaxing evening. Pictured are, from left: Renae Noble, president of CCTA and the Panhandle District; Marleta Hastings, Margaret Gregory, Shauna Golembiewski, Jessica Garcia, Shandi Motz, Sheyenne Sandstrom and Jill Paopao. Whitney Tewahade is not pictured.

### Aspiring Educators elect officers

NSEA Aspiring Educators held its annual Delegate Assembly the first weekend in April.

AE Members elected **Madison Witulski**, Peru State College, president; **Payton Schelin**, Doane University, president-elect; **Stephanie Wright**, Doane University, secretary; **Will Louis**, Doane University, underclassmen representative; **Megan Peklo**, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Metro Region representative; **Adrianne Kruger**, Wayne State College, Northeast Region representative; **Kalli-Ann Takafuji**, Doane University, Southeast Region representative; and **Alex Paxton**, Hastings College, Western Region representative.



**Witulski**

### Local associations boost NSEA Children's Fund

Members of 10 Nebraska education associations have given generously to the NSEA Children's Fund this school year. So far, contributions from Jeans Day events, where staff give a donation in exchange for wearing jeans on a specific day, have totaled \$9,272.

Contributions from September 1, 2020, to April 13, 2021 included **Wisner-Pilger** - \$250; **Columbus** - \$500; **Battle Creek** - \$325; **Logan View** - \$220; **Fillmore Central** - \$200; **Papillion-La Vista** - \$5,377; **Grand Island** - \$630; **Fremont** - \$385; **Norfolk City Teachers** - \$1,035; **Seward** - \$350.

"FPS has utilized the NSEA Children's Fund to assist many of our students with items they may need such as clothing, winter coats, supplies, etc., and we are very grateful the fund is available," **Fremont Education Association Treasurer Elizabeth Turner** said. "The NSEA Children's Fund has traditionally been one of our largest fundraisers as our FPS educators truly understand the importance of meeting our students' basic needs in order for our students to learn when at school."

The NSEA established the Children's Fund in 1994. It makes money available to NSEA members who might otherwise reach into their own pockets to buy a warm coat, shoes, eyeglasses or other necessities for students in need.

For more information on making a donation, or if you are a member with a student in need of assistance, call 1-800-742-0047 or go to [nsea.org/childrensfund](http://nsea.org/childrensfund).

### Stars of the State

NSEA Organizational Specialist **Mandy Faripour** and her mother, **Karen Faripour**, were honored as the 2020 Stars of the State for the organization they founded, **2Strings for Lincoln**, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

They rallied more than 300 volunteers to sew, cut fabric or donate money to make face masks. The group made about 12,000 masks and gave them to organizations including Tabitha, Madonna, Nebraska Hematology, Navajo Nation, LPS Summer School, Matt Talbot Communities, Foster Care Closet, El Centro de las Americas, Malone Center, several cancer centers and senior health facilities, the NSEA headquarters and more.

Retired educators, people working from home and those who were laid off were among the volunteers who wanted to help. They also made ear savers, instrument bell covers, surgical caps and adjustable ear ties to distribute where needed.



**New Normal:** Allen Consolidated staff had some fun with face masks for American Education Week.

### Plan ahead for American Education Week

American Education Week comes each November, and one Nebraska district is finding unique ways to celebrate its staff while embracing the trials of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For last fall's celebration, Allen Consolidated Schools staff designed a large poster featuring Allen staff with their "normal" faces and with their "new normal," masked faces. Students tried to match the masked photos to the correct staff. Every few days, the photos were rearranged for a new challenge.

"It was a fun event for all," said **Marlene Levine** of the **Allen Education Association**. "It is hard to distinguish someone with masks on, but they were doing a good job."

## Speaking of Education

“Children need all school workers. A person is not ‘just’ a janitor, not ‘just’ a custodian. Janitors can see children when [teachers] don’t see them, and bus drivers recognize that children who are disruptive on the bus are likely to be disorderly in the classroom. They’re partners in education. We need each other to make this work.”

— *Rev. Jesse Jackson*

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

## Certificates now available through Nebraska TEACH portal

Nebraska teachers whose teaching certificates are up for renewal in 2021 and beyond will now use the Nebraska TEACH (The Educator Application and Certification Hub) portal to renew or access their certificates through the Nebraska Department of Education.

The portal offers a more streamlined and efficient approach to updating or renewing certifications. It allows educators to apply for certification, upload transcripts, track their endorsements and communicate with NDE all in one place.

To access the portal, go to **teach.education.ne.gov**. Users accessing the new portal for the first time must first register by clicking the “Click here to register” button.

After registration is complete, users will need to log in. They will then be taken to a personalized educator dashboard, which will show information on experience back to 1982, degrees and endorsements, as well as the status of any current applications and a secure messaging feature for questions about an application. All information related to past

experience is obtained directly from school districts.

The NDE notes some changes from the previous portal:

■ Educators must use a personal email address to complete the registration. Their username and password will follow them throughout their teaching career, as they change school districts or retire and no longer have access to a former school email account. The portal may reject a school district email address, and district accounts may filter important messages from NDE, so using a personal account is required.

■ Receiving a certificate may take four to six weeks, though NDE said it is working to decrease this turnaround time. Once an application is submitted and received, applicants may track its progress on the portal



NEBRASKA  
TEACH

dashboard.

Registration instructions and more information may be found at **www.education.ne.gov/tcert** or by contacting NDE by phone at (402) 471-0739 or email at **nde.tcertweb@nebraska.gov**.

## Study shows art, music teachers most likely to hold second jobs

The National Center for Education Statistics released a new data report, *Outside Jobs Among U.S. Public School Teachers*, which describes U.S. public school teacher income from jobs outside the school system for the 2017-18 school year, categorized by main teaching assignment.

The late March findings include:

- During the 2017-18 school year, 18% of public school teachers held a job outside of the school system.
- Art or music teachers had the highest rate of taking on supplemental jobs (31%), and early childhood or general elementary teachers had the lowest rate (12%).
- The average amount earned in an outside job was \$5,800. Career

and technical education teachers (\$9,200) and health education teachers (\$7,000) both earned more than the average amount. Teachers in English/language arts (\$5,100) or in early childhood or general elementary education (\$4,700) earned less than the average amount in their outside jobs.

- Across all public school teachers who held a job outside the school system during the school year, 25% reported that their outside job was teaching or tutoring, 20% reported it was nonteaching but related to the teaching field, and 55% indicated it was some other type of job.

View the full report and additional results online at **bit.ly/3dckAZE**.

## Double check status of 2022-23 bargaining recognition request

Early spring is a busy time for local associations, and the conclusion of negotiations can overshadow an important step—board action on your 2022-23 negotiations recognition request.

While many locals routinely submit their recognition request the previous fall, a full year before actual bargaining begins, some wait until they wrap up current negotiations before submitting the annual request letter.

Regardless of how it’s handled in your local association, the opportunity to bargain an agreement hinges on getting your request approved as soon as possible.

Double check your records and board minutes to ensure that action was taken on the 2022-23 recognition request letter. If the request was tabled by the board or the superintendent hasn’t yet placed it on the agenda, ask that it be placed on the next board agenda for immediate action.

If you encounter delays, contact your NSEA Organizational Specialist immediately by calling 1-800-742-0047.