The VOICE
Nebraska State Education Association — November 2026



A New Generation at the Table

Fresh Perspectives Shape Bargaining at Waverly Education Association

- Updated Retention Grants Information
- Strategic Plan Refresh New Mission, New Goals
- Election 2026: Your Vote Matters

Nebraska State Education Association
The VOICE

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A Great Public School for Every Child.

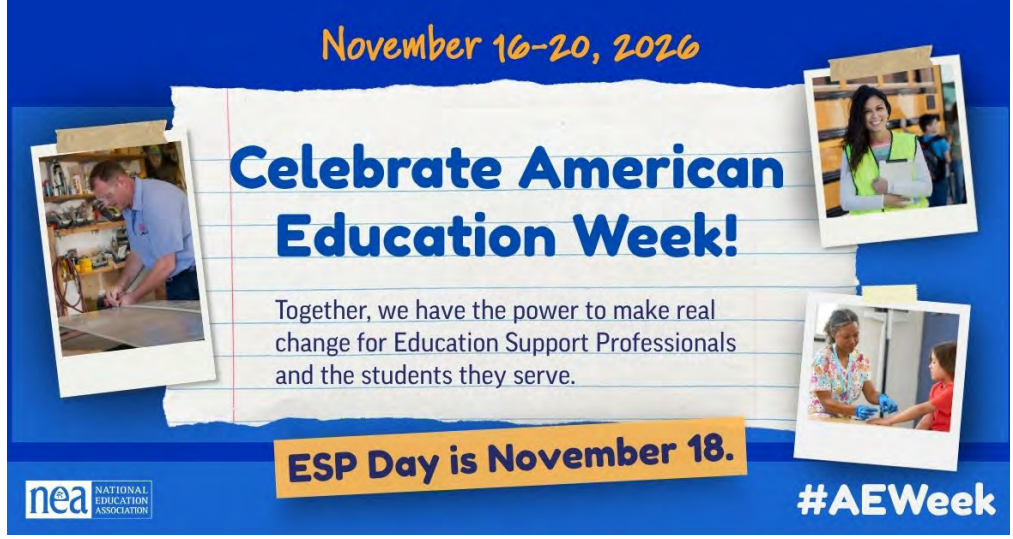
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Celebrate American Education Week

American Education Week (AEW) celebrates the achievements of public schools across the nation and honors the educators and school staff who make a difference in students' lives every day. This year, American Education Week will be celebrated Nov. 16-20.

Each day of American Education Week highlights the contributions of individuals who help public schools thrive. From classroom teachers and education support professionals to substitute educators, families and community members, everyone plays an important role in student success.

Schools and communities are encouraged to celebrate throughout the week by recognizing school employees, engaging families and highlighting the importance of strong public schools.

Monday: Kickoff Day
Start the week by introducing students, staff and families to American Education Week. Share planned activities, highlight the importance of public education and encourage everyone to participate in the celebration.

Tuesday: Family Day
Recognize the important role families play in student success. Invite parents, guardians and caregivers to participate in school activities, visit classrooms and experience a day in their students' learning environment.

Wednesday: Education Support Professionals Day
Celebrate the education support professionals and recognize the contributions of paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodians, food service workers, administrative staff and other essential school employees.

Thursday: Educator for a Day
Invite community leaders, elected officials and other guests to experience a day in the life of a public school educator. This helps participants understand the responsibilities and rewards of working in education.

Friday: Substitute Educators Day
Honor substitute educators for their essential role in maintaining continuity of learning when regular classroom educators are absent.

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

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

thevoice@nsea.org

On the Cover: A new generation of Waverly Education Association members step up to the bargaining table, finding strength in one another as they learn the ropes and prepare to negotiate their first contract together. Read the story on pages 7–8.



PRESIDENT'S *MESSAGE*

TIM **ROYERS**

The Work of Generations

> **"The decisions we make today will help determine what this association looks like for the educators who follow us. That is why this strategic planning process matters. We have an opportunity to consider what we want public education, our profession and our union to look like for the next generation."**



Last month, we kicked off the strategic planning process to lay the foundation for what we hope to accomplish as an organization over the next several years. A team of members gathered at NSEA headquarters in Lincoln to begin critical conversations about our mission, vision and values.

The team reflects the diversity of our membership, with educators representing every level of education, from early childhood through higher education. It includes Aspiring Educators, active members and retirees, with voices from across the state, from the Panhandle to the banks of the Missouri River.

Building Our Future

To make sure we capture the wide variety of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives within our union, we are asking everyone involved in the process to have conversations with other members over the coming months. By the time the plan is completed and presented to Delegate Assembly, more than 500 members will have had an opportunity to help shape NSEA's goals for the years ahead.

This process is about more than deciding what our priorities should be. It is about making sure those priorities reflect the people who make this association what it is. Every member brings a different perspective shaped by their students, their colleagues and the communities they serve. When we make room for those experiences, we build a stronger organization and a clearer understanding of where we need to go together.

Whether we are developing our strategic plan, forming our legislative agenda or making other important organizational decisions, we must keep you, the member, at the center of that work. Many of the educators who volunteered for the strategic planning team had never been involved at the state level before. Their willingness to step forward is a reminder that you do not need years of experience in association leadership to make a difference. You simply need to be willing to get involved.

Shaping Our Future

We are also approaching two important anniversaries for our organization and profession. Next October, we will celebrate the 160th anniversary of NSEA's founding. And this coming summer, we will mark 60 years since Nebraska teachers secured the right to collectively bargain.

That progress did not happen by accident. It happened because generations of educators recognized the challenges facing their profession and organized to do something about them. The rights and opportunities we benefit from today are the result of their determination, their advocacy and their willingness to stand together.

We have a responsibility to build on what they accomplished. The decisions we make today will help determine what this association looks like for the educators who follow us. That is why this strategic planning process matters. We have an opportunity to consider what we want public education, our profession and our union to look like for the next generation.

As we celebrate these milestones, I hope we take pride in how far we have come while recognizing that our work is far from finished. The educators who came before us helped shape the profession we know today. Now it is our turn to ask ourselves: What can we accomplish together that future generations of educators will look back on and celebrate?

NSEA Presents

Family of teachers



Pictured seated, from left: Verna Lee Kindig Tubbs, Brooke Tubbs, Tia Jones, Mary Eugenia Berve. Standing, from left: Stephanie Berve, Devon Jones, Patrice Tubbs, Cyndi Berve, Tom Berve and Dan Berve.

Education runs deep in the Tubbs, Berve and Jones family, with generations of educators contributing more than a century of service to schools across the country.

The family gathered in March 2026 to celebrate the 100th birthday of Verna Lee Kindig Tubbs, a retired Nebraska educator who taught business, typing and social studies in Beatrice, Bassett and Roseland. A lifetime member of NSEA and NEA, Verna died Aug. 3, 2026, at age 100. Her late husband, Niel, also dedicated more than 40 years to education, teaching chemistry and other sciences.

Their family's legacy continues through Brooke Tubbs, a former teaching assistant; Tia Jones, a former math teacher; and Mary Eugenia Berve, a school counselor.

Other family members include Stephanie Berve, an art teacher; Devon Jones, a health and physical education teacher and soccer coach; Patrice Tubbs, a former music teacher; Cyndi Berve, a retired French and Spanish teacher and coach; Tom Berve, a retired social studies teacher and coach; and Dan Berve, a former swim coach and aquatics director.

Together, their dedication to education reflects a family legacy that spans generations, classrooms and communities.

Does teaching run in your family? Share your family's story and photo at www.nsea.org/Family.



Sheryl Norman

Member Receives National Teaching Excellence Award

Palmer Education Association member Sheryl Norman has been named one of 43 recipients of the 2027 Travelers Insurance Awards for Teaching Excellence by The NEA Foundation.

The national award recognizes public school educators for excellence in the classroom, leadership in the teaching profession, community engagement and a commitment to expanding opportunities for students through public education.

Norman, a fourth-grade teacher at Palmer Public Schools, was previously honored as the recipient of the 2026 NSEA Award for Teaching Excellence during NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April.

As a national award recipient, Norman will be recognized at The NEA Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala in Washington, D.C., in February 2027.

Shine a Spotlight on an Exceptional Educator

Is there an educator, education support professional, local association or education advocate whose work deserves recognition? Now is the time to consider nominating them for an NSEA award.

Each year at Delegate Assembly, NSEA honors educators, ESPs, local associations and public education advocates for excellence in education, community service, advocacy and human and civil rights.

Members are eligible for several awards, including the Early Career Educator, Award for Teaching Excellence, Education Support Professional of the Year, Community Service and Tom Black Local Public Relations awards. Members may also nominate individuals, organizations and community partners for the Great Plains Milestone, Administrator of Excellence, Friend of Education and Outstanding Media awards.

The Friend of Education Award is NSEA's highest honor, recognizing an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or Nebraska educators.

A member-led committee is reviewing the awards program to simplify nominations. The awards will be posted at www.nsea.org/da. In the meantime, consider colleagues and community partners deserving recognition. The 2027 Delegate Assembly will be held April 23-24 at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

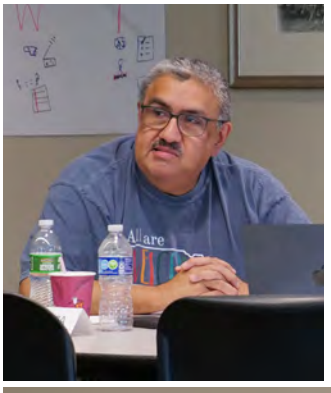
Strategic Plan Refresh: New Mission, New Goals

Sixteen members gather input to shape NSEA's mission and goals











More than 130 NSEA members stepped forward to express interest in serving on the association's Strategic Planning Team, demonstrating strong member interest in helping determine NSEA's future direction.

From those volunteers, 16 members were selected to serve on the team, representing a broad cross-section of NSEA's membership. The group includes educators from early childhood through higher education, Aspiring Educators and retired members, with representation from communities across Nebraska.

The team recently met at NSEA headquarters in Lincoln to begin the process of reviewing the association's mission, vision and values and identifying priorities for a new strategic plan.

During the initial meeting, members began discussing the association's current direction, opportunities for improvement and ways to gather meaningful input from educators across the state.

An important part of the team's work will take place outside its meetings. Members will connect with colleagues and local associations to gather perspectives on what NSEA does well, where improvements can be made and what priorities should guide the association in the coming years.

The process is expected to involve more than 500 NSEA members, giving educators across the state an opportunity to contribute to the development of the plan.

Feedback gathered through these conversations will inform the team's recommendations for an updated mission, vision and strategic goals.

The proposed strategic plan will be presented at the 2027 NSEA Delegate Assembly, April 23-24.

The strong response from members reflects an encouraging level of interest in shaping NSEA's future. Watch upcoming issues of *The Voice* for updates on the planning process and additional opportunities to get involved.



Back row, from left: Tim Royers, Paul Schulte, Kathy Poehling, Ed Ventura, Becky Cleveland, Guy Roggenkamp, Renae Noble and Elizabeth Henderson. **Front row, from left:** Josh Holden, Carrie George, Nicole Lopez Bettendorf, Audel Salazar, Becky Lenser, Kari Frerichs, Mary Reynolds East and Kristi Rastede.

NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant

The NDE is excited to launch the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program (TRRA). Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-8,113, the purpose of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program is "to provide financial incentives to recruit and retain teachers in Nebraska classrooms." This program is open to teachers from public and nonpublic schools, as well as teachers employed by an ESU.



The retention grant is for **$2,500** for teachers in their 2nd, 4th or 6th year of teaching. This includes time teaching outside of Nebraska.

The high-needs grant is a one-time grant for **$5,000** for teachers who have been issued an endorsement in specific high-needs areas with a contract to teach in that area or teaches at least one dual enrollment course during the 2026-27 school year. You can check your issue date of your endorsement at: teach.education.ne.gov. It must be issued on or after 6/2/2023.

Information on the program guidelines, FAQ's, and application can be found at: education.ne.gov/csds/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-act/ or by scanning the QR code.

After the application closes, you will receive instructions on next steps. **This program ends on January 1, 2028.**

The application **opens January 7, 2027 and closes February 7, 2027 at 11:59pm** approvals are on a first-come-first-serve basis. If you qualify for both grants, you may select both grants during the application process.



The Waverly Education Association's new bargaining team. Front, from left: President Tiffany Dalton, Gina Boltz and lead negotiator Ryan Abbott. Back, from left: Susan Stake and Travis Moore.

A New Generation at the Table

New Team, Fresh Approach to Bargaining in Waverly Education Association

When the Waverly Education Association (WEA) and the district's administrative team sat down at the bargaining table, the first question had nothing to do with salaries, benefits or working conditions.

It was a trivia question.

"The question was, 'Most people who purchase this item are between 47 and 50 years old. What is it?'" recalled WEA President Tiffany Dalton.

The answer? A motorcycle.

Trivia questions have become a tradition at WEA's initial bargaining meetings, a practice believed to have been started by longtime team member and trivia enthusiast Leah Wilcox.

Passing the Baton

After years of serving as association president and lead negotiator, Michael Cobelens decided it was time to pass the baton. His decision created an opportunity for new educators to step into leadership roles while building on the experience of longtime bargaining team members. For Dalton, a Spanish teacher at Waverly High School, the decision to take on a leadership role was not one she made lightly.

"It became clear that Mike was going to be looking for a replacement last year," Dalton said. "And so I slept on it for a really long time."

By the middle of the school year, she had accepted the president-elect position and begun shadowing Cobelens.

Although the learning curve has been steep, she said support from NSEA and fellow members has helped her navigate the transition.

Stepping Up for WEA

The leadership transition brings new perspectives to an established bargaining team, combining fresh ideas with the continuity and experience of longtime members.

New lead negotiator Ryan Abbott, a Waverly High School social studies teacher, previously taught in Texas and Louisiana, where educators lack Nebraska's collective bargaining protections. Both states have adopted private school voucher schemes that divert public funds to private education, even as Texas districts close schools and cut educator positions amid funding shortfalls. Providing continuity are longtime WEA bargaining team members secretary Becky Schroeder, an early childhood teacher, and treasurer Leah Wilcox, a middle school science and math teacher.

While some members have previous bargaining experience, others are participating for the first time. At least on this side of the table.

Travis Moore, a Waverly High School social studies teacher, previously served on the Waverly School District 145 Board of Education, giving him a unique perspective on negotiations. The team also includes veteran educators Susan Stake, a middle school teacher, and Gina Boltz, a fifth-grade teacher, along with Angie Konen, a building representative at Waverly Intermediate School.

"I've never done negotiations, but this is a whole new journey for me," Boltz said. "I love learning new things. I've been asking a lot of questions."

That willingness to learn is matched by a commitment to preparation. Dalton and Abbott attended NSEA's STRONG Conference in Omaha, while team members participated

in bargaining dinners held in late October.

"It's been trial by fire," Dalton said. "We're just finding our way, but getting lots of support from NSEA."

The team is conducting its own compensation study, examining agreements in comparable districts to better understand how Waverly's salaries, benefits and contract provisions measure up. Abbott has worked with NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas to learn MicroSearch, a database that allows bargaining teams to research and compare district contracts.

The team also benefits from Moore's previous service on the Waverly school board, which offers insight into the district's perspective on negotiations. His experience working with the Unicameral's Legislative Research Office brings additional research skills to the bargaining process.

Together, those resources will help the team independently verify district information and develop well-supported proposals.

"We don't want to be at the table just going off vibes," Abbott joked.

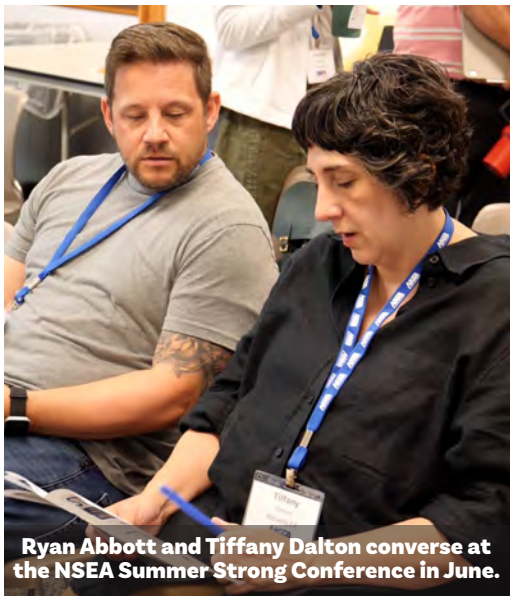
Beyond the Survey

The new leadership is also making member engagement a priority. While WEA has traditionally surveyed members to identify bargaining priorities, Dalton has taken the process a step further by visiting school buildings and speaking one-on-one with educators about their concerns. As a new president, she said those conversations are especially important in deepening her understanding of members' needs and ensuring their voices are represented at the bargaining table.

"I'm still in the process of absorbing information from our membership, because I really want to do our best to represent their interests," she said.

Among the issues under consideration are paid time off and equitable movement on the salary schedule. The team hopes to revisit proposals from previous negotiations while remaining open to additional priorities identified by members.

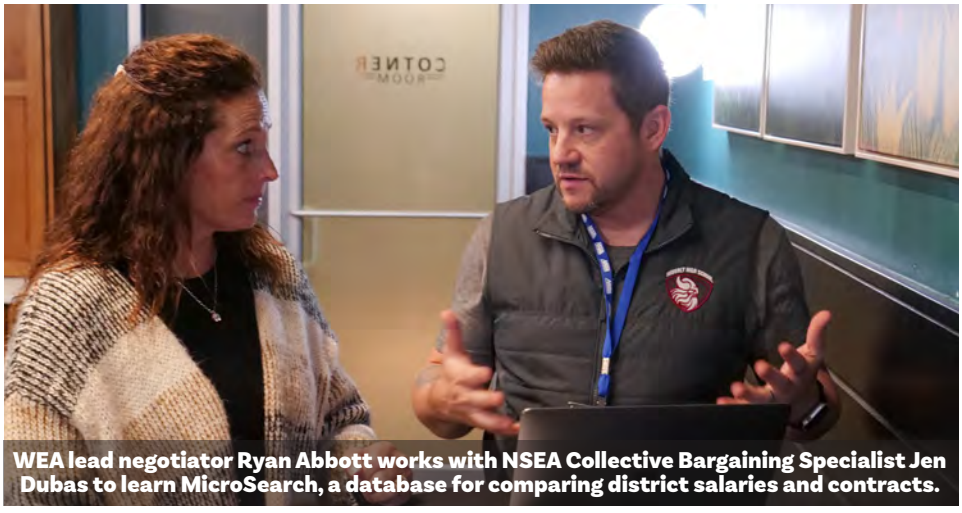
Although Cobelens is stepping away from leading negotiations, his experience remains a resource for the team. He was recognized in May during WEA's annual retirement tea, which also honors district educators reaching years-of-service milestones. Cobelens will continue offering guidance as members navigate the bargaining process.



Ryan Abbott and Tiffany Dalton converse at the NSEA Summer Strong Conference in June.



Longtime WEA chief negotiator Michael Cobelens receives a service award.



WEA lead negotiator Ryan Abbott works with NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas to learn MicroSearch, a database for comparing district salaries and contracts.

That transfer of knowledge reflects a tradition of educators preparing the next generation to exercise and protect their collective bargaining rights. In 2027, Nebraska will mark 60 years since the passage of the Teachers' Professional Negotiations Act, a reminder that those rights were secured through decades of organizing and advocacy.

Nebraska law gives public educators the right to collective representation and establishes a timeline for negotiations between school districts and bargaining teams. These protections provide a structured process for addressing salaries, benefits and working conditions.

Those rights cannot be taken for granted. In neighboring Iowa, lawmakers sharply restricted collective bargaining for most public employees in 2017. Wisconsin enacted similar restrictions in 2011, limiting negotiations for most public employees to base wages and placing additional requirements on unions.

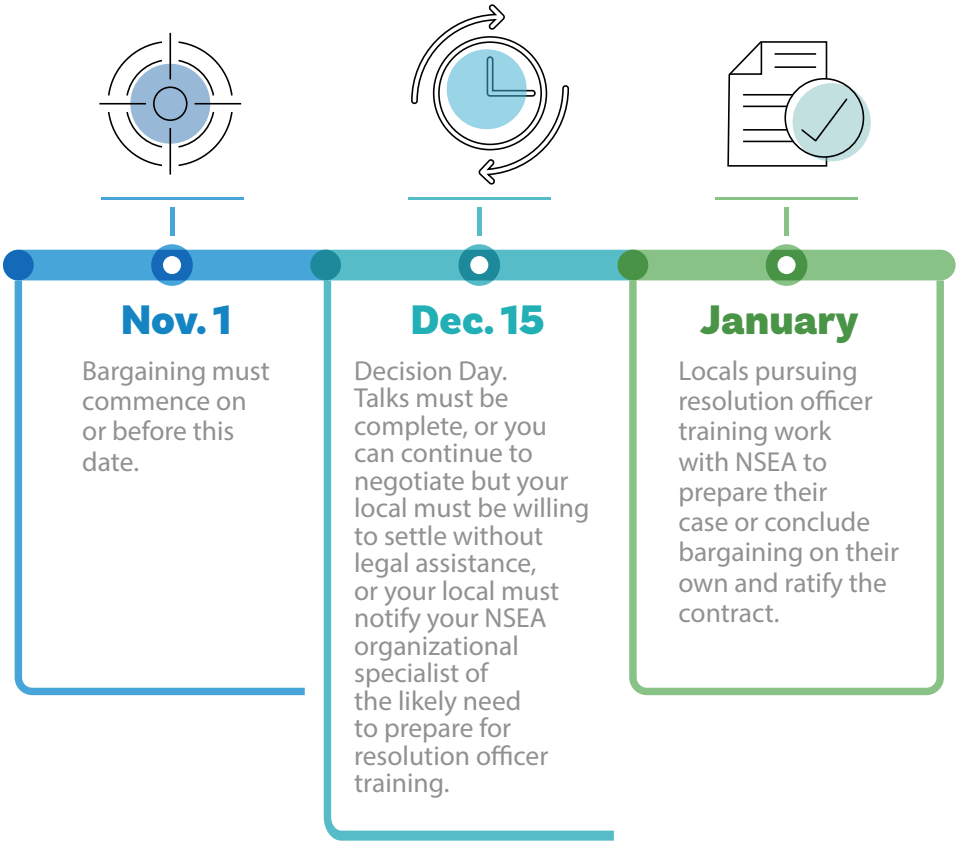
For Dalton, protecting those rights was a driving factor in her decision to step into leadership.

"I do understand how badly that is needed and how frightening for educators it would be if we were to lose that," Dalton said.

As another bargaining season begins, Waverly's bargaining team demonstrates that the strength of collective bargaining depends not only on the agreements reached at the table, but also on experienced members sharing their knowledge and new leaders willing to step forward to protect the rights secured by generations of educators before them.

Bargaining Calendar for 2028-29 Contract

State law sets a firm schedule for bargaining activities, which determine your pay and working conditions. Now is the time to bargain for the 2028-29 contract year.



For further details, talk with your NSEA Organizational Specialist. Find your representative at www.nsea.org/Field-Staff-Units

Nebraska's Right to Bargain: A Brief History

Nebraska's collective bargaining history dates to 1920, when voters approved a constitutional amendment authorizing the Legislature to establish a tribunal to resolve labor disputes. That authority laid the groundwork for the creation of the Court of Industrial Relations (CIR) in 1947. Initially, the court's jurisdiction was limited, leaving public school educators without access to its dispute resolution process.

A major breakthrough came in 1967 with the passage of LB485, the Nebraska Teachers' Professional Negotiations Act. Backed by NSEA, the legislation gave educators and their association the statutory authority to organize and negotiate with school districts over wages, benefits and working conditions for the first time. However, the law was considered permissive, allowing school districts to determine whether to recognize bargaining units and which issues could be negotiated.

Two years later, the Legislature passed LB15, extending collective bargaining rights to public employees, including teachers and education support professionals. The 1969 legislation established a more comprehensive framework for public-sector bargaining, strengthening educators' ability to negotiate collectively and resolve disputes.

Additional legislation in 1974 streamlined the Court of Industrial Relations' operations and established timelines for handling disputes. In 1979, the court became the Commission of Industrial Relations, reflecting the continued evolution of Nebraska's collective bargaining system.

The framework underwent another significant update in 2011 with LB397, which modernized the Industrial Relations Act, revised dispute resolution procedures and aligned school bargaining timelines more closely with district budgeting processes.

Nearly 60 years after LB485, collective bargaining remains essential to securing fair compensation, protecting working conditions and giving Nebraska educators a voice in their profession.

NSEA Members Celebrate a Busy Fall



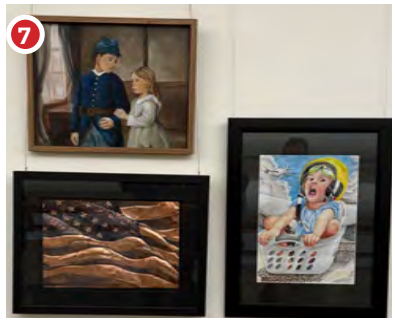














Fall Activities: 1. Zac Konrad celebrates his Teacher of the Year announcement with students. 2. Paul Schulte, Shauna Benjamin-Brice, Tim Royers and Isau Metes at the NSEA tailgate. 3. NEA Director Ed Ventura, a Rep. Flood political staffer and NSEA-Retired President John Heineman during NEA Superweek. 4. NSEA's "Go Big Red for Ed" window display. 5. Norris Association of Educators Matt Rosenau and Carolyn Enevoldsen attend an NSEA bargaining dinner. 6. NSEA Field Staff Megan Lyons and Travis Vo during a LEA membership blitz. 7. Nebraska student artwork on display in Washington, D.C. 8. Tim Royers and Paul Schulte play Cornhole at the NSEA tailgate.

From celebrating outstanding educators to cheering on the Huskers, NSEA members and staff have had a busy fall!

September brought exciting news when NSEA member Zac Konrad, a band teacher at Papillion Middle School, was named the 2027 Nebraska Teacher of the Year. Konrad received the honor during a surprise announcement Sept. 17, recognizing his dedication to students and excellence in education.

The celebrations continued Sept. 26 with NSEA's "Go Big Red for Ed" tailgate at the association's Lincoln headquarters. Members and staff gathered for food, games and Husker football as Nebraska defeated Michigan State 31-13.

To show their Husker spirit and support for public education, NSEA staff transformed the fourth-floor windows of headquarters into a giant "Go Big Red for Ed" display, visible from outside the building.

In early October, NSEA leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., for NEA Superweek. NSEA President Tim Royers, Vice President Paul Schulte, NSEA-Retired President John Heineman and NEA Director Edward Ventura Jr. joined fellow education advocates for a week of meetings and advocacy on Capitol Hill.

The NEA Board of Directors also convened for its first meeting under newly elected NEA President Princess Moss, Vice President Noel Candelaria and Secretary-Treasurer Robert Rodriguez. The gathering included Hispanic Heritage and American Indian and Alaska Native observances.

Back in Nebraska, NSEA members and staff have been equally busy with membership blitzes and bargaining dinners across the state. These gatherings provide opportunities to welcome new members, strengthen local associations and help educators prepare for the upcoming bargaining season.

From local organizing efforts to national advocacy, NSEA members continue to demonstrate the strength of their union through involvement, leadership and collective action.

Apply now for 2027 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants



Belz



Lynch



Krause

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 2027 application deadline is Monday, March 1, 2027.

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 project success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March 1, 2027. 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.

A New Mailing Format for *The Voice*



Beginning with the October issue, *The Voice* arrived in your mailbox folded and tabbed rather than in its traditional mailing format. This small change will help NSEA reduce mailing costs while continuing to deliver the same great member stories, association news and information about public education across Nebraska.

The packaging may look different, but inside, it's still the same *The Voice* you know and trust. Watch your email for upcoming digital editions, with the next print issue arriving in January.



Have a student teacher?

Give the Gift of Aspiring Educators 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 Educator 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.

What I Wish I Knew

By Rae Carlson
English teacher, Nebraska State Education Association



First Appeared In NEA Today, October 2026

IN THIS ESSAY, TEACHER RAE CARLSON SHARES 10 (PLUS!) LESSONS SHE LEARNED IN THE FIRST DECADE OF HER TEACHING LIFE

It was 3:52 p.m., in January of my first year. My students filed out of the classroom, scattering to their extra-curriculars, not realizing the chaos and devastation they laid in their wake. In just 52 minutes, on what was supposed to be an exciting day one of a multiday project, my seniors had rejected not only the ideas I presented to them, but also the idea of me being their teacher. For months, I had been repressing my feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

That afternoon, I broke—deeply questioning if I was meant to be a teacher. I cried for the entire half-hour drive back to the town I lived in, and then found myself on my bathroom floor, still crying.

Feeling helpless, feeling lost, I called my college mentor who was a fourth-year teacher, and poured my heart out. After 80 minutes of tears and affirmations, she said, "Rae, you are not able to reach them all, but you should never stop trying."

Those words sit with me even to this day, and have made me realize there are other things I wish I'd known as a first-year teacher. Here are 10 key insights I've gained over the years that still help me today, and hopefully will help you, too.

1 Read your contract.

Know what you're required to do and what you're not contractually obligated to do. You *can* say no to things. It doesn't make you any less of a teacher if you choose yourself, your happiness, and your time over doing a bunch of extras.

In our system, we reward those who overextend themselves with accolades and awards. But an exhausted educator isn't good for students, and is more likely to burn out and leave the profession.

2 Do not pour from an empty cup.

By the very nature of this profession, we embed pieces of our souls into our daily work. But when you overly invest emotionally, you burn the candle at both ends. This expectation of sacrifice is a systemic crisis. We cannot "self-care" our way out of it, and it very quickly leads to profound demoralization.

Carlson teaches English and runs the Educators Rising program for future teachers at Bryan High School, in Omaha, Neb., and also is chief negotiator for the Omaha Education Association.

3 Cry, if you want to.

You may try to hide your struggles, your pain, and your tears, because maybe you feel it makes you look weak and vulnerable when you want to feel intelligent and powerful. But showing emotion is a sign of strength and empowerment.

4 Protect and make space for your hobbies.

We do this weird thing when we become educators: We make teaching our identity, and we lose our sense of self, of who we were before we became teachers.

You cannot let your career consume your entire identity. Nurturing your hobbies isn't a luxury, it is a necessity. Your well-being depends on having a life outside the classroom.

5 Refuse to feel guilt when you are doing your best.

On difficult days, it is okay if your 100 percent looks like someone else's 50 percent. If the kids were safe, cared for, and managed to learn something, you did well enough. This is a grace we need to extend not only to ourselves as educators, but to our students as well.

6 Build lasting relationships that sustain you, not drain you.

Find your marigolds—the people who put nutrients back into your soil, like marigolds do. When you've got a bunch of marigolds surrounding you, you will have support when dealing with difficult conversations, classroom behaviors, unfair administrators, and so much more. For me, and hopefully you, that's our union.

7 Don't let the fear of consequence keep you from speaking up and speaking your truth.

So often, newer educators fear speaking up and speaking out—even when they witness a clear educational injustice—because they worry about losing their jobs. Being part of the union doesn't just secure your position; it protects your right to stand up. It strengthens your armor when you choose to do what is right, even if everyone else around you is doing what is wrong.

8 Remember the support professionals who are there to support the students—and you!

The people in your building have your back—whether they are custodians, secretaries, nutritionists, or serve in another staff role. Include them in every way you wish to be included.

9 Be human.

When we step out from behind the curtain of perfection and show our students our humanity, we give them permission to do the same. Keep in mind that you're shaping the youth who will inherit this world. Keep at it.

10 Get involved.

Your voice matters. When you aren't part of the conversation, decisions are made about you, not with you. If you don't like the direction of your contract or a school program, you have to get involved. Work through your union to step up, make your voice heard, and drive the changes that directly affect you and your colleagues.

Bonus item!

I was lucky. I joined NEA as an aspiring educator more than a decade ago, and knew to turn to the union during the hardest moments of my first year. Not everybody does—and we need to change that. So, my final piece of advice is for my peers, those of us who have found the power of the collective. Find that early career educator, and be their marigold. You might just become the phone call they need to make on the hardest day of their career.



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NSEA's Jason Wiese accepts a donation for the NSEA Children's Fund during Nye Legacy's "Give Like Dolly Day" in Fremont.

No RED TAPE, Just Help:

How the Children's Fund Supports Kids in Need

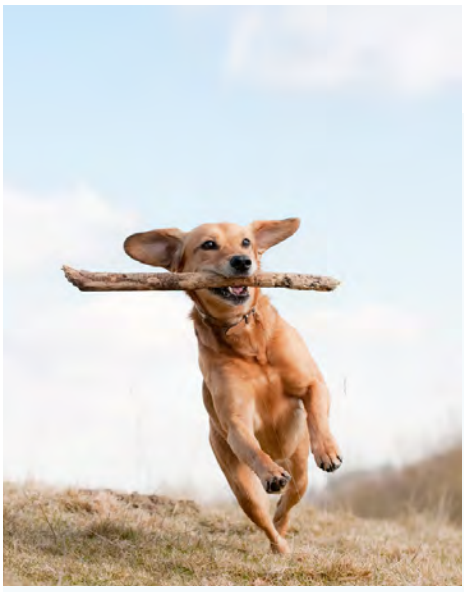


Where there is a child in need, there is likely a teacher willing to help by opening their wallet. Teachers frequently spend their own hard-earned dollars to help these children. But a teacher can't assist every child encountered during the school day, much less during the school year. That is why NSEA created the Children's Fund. Since 1994, donations to the Children's Fund have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help children in need.

The generosity of Children's Fund donors has helped pay for glasses, warm clothing and the medical and dental needs of children, to name a few. The Fund has provided assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire, helped children purchase bus tickets and much more.

Local associations are encouraged to brainstorm fundraising ideas, to challenge other local associations,to collect change, host a jeans day fundraiser, or consider other ways to contribute toward the fund.

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.



Protect Your Pets With NEA Member Benefits

Pets are part of the family, but unexpected accidents and illnesses can lead to costly veterinary bills. The NEA Pet Insurance Program, offered and administered by Pets Best Insurance, helps members manage those expenses.

NEA members can receive a 5% discount on eligible accident and illness plans, plus an additional 5% discount when insuring multiple pets. Accident-only coverage starts at $6 per month for cats and $9 for dogs. Members can visit any licensed veterinarian, emergency clinic or specialist in the U.S.

The program also includes free, 24-hour access to the Pet Helpline, where members can call, chat or email veterinary experts about health concerns, emergencies or behavioral questions.

To explore coverage options or request a free quote, visit www.neamb.com/products/nea-pet-insurance.

Did You Know You Can Manage Your Health Plan Online Anytime?

Have a question about your deductible? Want to check the status of a claim? Need to find an in-network provider? Looking to check the status of a recent pre-authorization? Your online member account can help. EHA members can access their health plan information anytime through the online member portal or the Nebraska Blue mobile app.

Your online member account serves as a one-stop destination for managing your health plan. Members can view claims information, review benefits, track deductibles and out-of-pocket costs and search for in-network doctors and facilities. Having access to this information whenever you need it can make managing your healthcare simpler and more convenient.

For even greater convenience, members can download the Nebraska Blue app and access many of the same features directly from their smartphone. Whether you're at home, at work or on the go, your health plan information is always within reach. The app also makes it easy to access your digital ID card when you need it.

Taking a few minutes to register for your online member account can save time later and help you stay informed about your health benefits and coverage.

To get started, log in through the Nebraska Blue app or visit myNebraskaBlue.com.



Seeking student debt relief? We can help!

Find student loan forgiveness programs with the NEA Student Debt Navigator

- On average, members **save $2,000 annually** on their student loans using the Navigator
- **Determine your eligibility** for federal programs to reduce and manage your student debt
- Members enjoy **one year of free access** to the Navigator, powered by SAVI

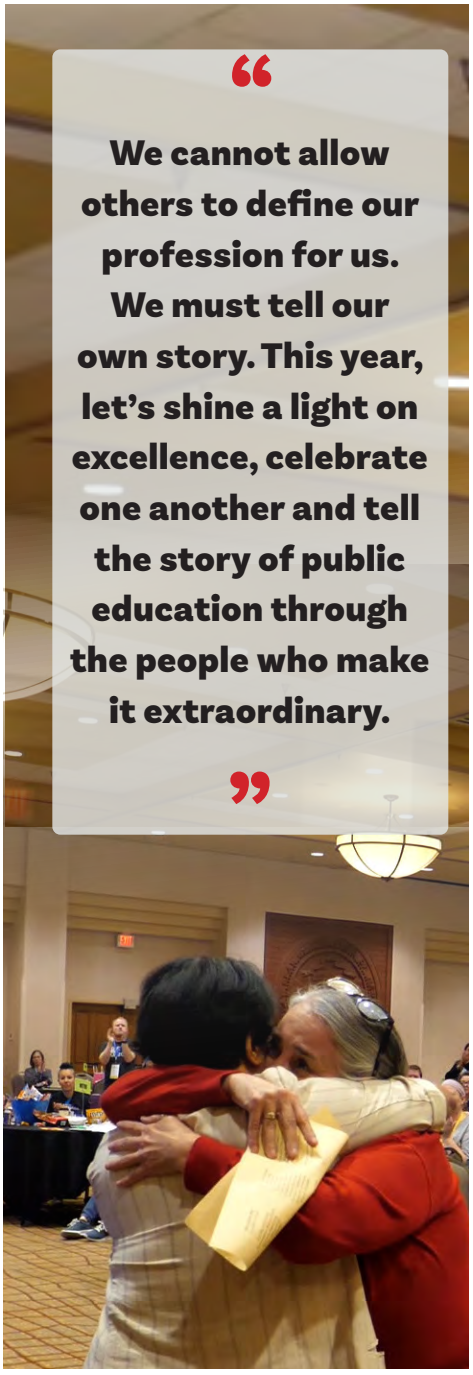
Access student debt relief resources today!

nea Member Benefits



Message from the Executive Director

ISAU **METES**



Shine a Light on Excellence

NSEA members do extraordinary things every day. I have worked with so many exceptional educators, and often, they are the ones who deflect credit. They are the paraeducators who help students calm down and return to learning. They are the bus drivers who safely navigate a bus full of rambunctious students or worry when one of their riders has been absent for days. They are the counselors who guide students to graduation and provide a safe space to feel their emotions. They are the teachers who spend hours helping students cross the finish line and create learning environments where every student feels safe and supported. They are the professors who balance teaching, mentoring and publishing research.

When educators receive a compliment, they often brush it aside with phrases like, “I’m just doing my job,” “Everybody does good work” or “I’m not special.” They shift the spotlight and return their focus to serving students. Humility is one of the defining characteristics of educators. Sometimes, we forget just how remarkable we truly are.

There is so much joy in what we do. Seeing a former student succeed is a feeling that is hard to describe. There is a sense of relief and pride when I see a former student who made it through despite challenges, especially when I know they are OK. We also find joy in colleagues who inspire us, lead with kindness and remind us why we chose this profession. What we accomplish together is remarkable.

Recognition With Purpose

Many educators are uncomfortable with recognition. Have you ever been told that you are bad at accepting compliments? Does the idea of walking across a stage while hundreds of people applaud sound more like a nightmare? What if we shifted our thinking and viewed recognition as an opportunity to highlight our schools, local associations and profession?

Awards are about more than a plaque and applause. They help tell the story of public education, highlight practices worth sharing and remind us of the impact educators and education support professionals have on students every day.

Why Recognition Matters

Every nomination is an act of appreciation. It is one way we tell our colleagues, “I see you. I see your passion. I see your impact.” It is how we show admiration for one another, encourage excellence and help one another reach our full potential.

I encourage everyone to nominate one person this year. In fact, I am going to take it a step further and ask you to consider nominating yourself. If that feels like a bridge too far today, I am confident you can think of a colleague who deserves recognition. Someone who goes above and beyond to enhance learning environments, strengthen communities, advocate for public education and create opportunities for students.

We cannot allow others to define our profession for us. We must tell our own story. This year, let’s shine a light on excellence, celebrate one another and tell the story of public education through the people who make it extraordinary.

Please consider nominating someone for a 2027 NSEA Delegate Assembly Award. Someone in your local or school deserves recognition for the work they do every day on behalf of students.

We know them. We work beside them. We pass them in the hallway. Sometimes, we are them.

LEA-Retired Members Stretch Into Wellness With Chair Yoga

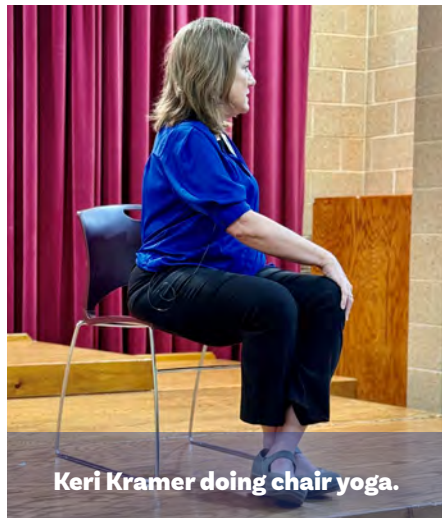
Members of the Lincoln Education Association-Retired (LEA-Retired) gathered in late September for a program focused on wellness, flexibility and injury prevention.

Keri Kramer and Nate Driml of Madonna Wellness Club shared information about the importance of staying active and incorporating stretching into daily routines. Members also participated in a chair yoga session, practicing gentle movements designed to improve flexibility, support balance and maintain mobility.

Madonna Wellness Club is part of Lincoln-based Madonna Rehabilitation Hospitals, nationally recognized for its specialized rehabilitation services. The wellness center extends Madonna's mission beyond rehabilitation by offering fitness programs that emphasize preventive care, physical activity and long-term health.

Regular stretching and low-impact exercise can be especially beneficial as people age, helping maintain range of motion and reduce muscle stiffness

The program highlighted how maintaining strength, flexibility and balance can help older adults preserve independence and enjoy an active lifestyle.



Keri Kramer doing chair yoga.



Madonna Wellness Club's Keri Kramer, LEA-Retired President Joe Shandera and Madonna's Nate Driml.



LEA-Retired members practice stretching exercises during a wellness program led by Madonna Wellness Club staff.

Last Chance to Attend Medicare Insurance Seminars

There's still time to take advantage of NSEA-Retired's annual Medicare informational seminars, presented in partnership with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. These free seminars cover Medicare basics, coverage options available through Educators' Medicare Supplement and how to select a Medicare Part D prescription drug plan.

For members approaching Medicare eligibility, the seminars offer an opportunity to better understand coverage options, enrollment considerations and important decisions ahead. Even those already enrolled in Medicare may benefit from reviewing their coverage and learning more about available options. With annual enrollment underway, now is a good time to revisit your health care needs and make sure your coverage continues to meet them. The accompanying chart provides dates and times for the remaining seminars.

If you missed the in-person seminars, three additional sessions will be offered via Zoom on Nov. 4, Nov. 10 and Nov. 12. These virtual sessions provide one final opportunity to get valuable information and answers to your Medicare questions. Visit www.nsea.org/retired for seminar details and information on how to participate.

BCBS In-Person Sessions

Morning sessions: 9:30 – 11:00 a.m. (check in at 9 a.m.)
Afternoon sessions: 1:30 – 3 p.m. (check in at 1 p.m.)

Lincoln	Tuesday, Nov. 3 Jack J. Huck Continuing Education Center, Rooms 302 and 303 (301 South 68th St. Place)
Omaha	Thursday, Nov. 5 OPS TAC Building – Boardroom, 2nd Floor (3215 Cuming St.)
Norfolk	Wednesday, Nov. 11 Northeast Community College – Lifelong Learning Center, Suites F and G (701 East Benjamin Ave.)

Aspiring Educators Plan Fall Webinar, Statewide Food Drive

NSEA-Aspiring Educators (NSEA-AE) members have two opportunities this fall to strengthen their professional skills, connect with fellow future educators and make a difference in their communities.

The NSEA-AE Fall Webinar will be held Saturday, Nov. 7, from 10 a.m. to noon via Zoom. The free event will feature four speakers offering perspectives on the teaching profession.

Stephanie Chavez, NEA Aspiring Educators national chairperson and a student teacher at Elmhurst University, will discuss union involvement. Lisa Elsasser, a kindergarten teacher at La Vista West Elementary School and recipient of the Nebraska Department of Education's 2027 Award of Excellence, will share classroom experiences and insights into teacher efficacy.

Ryan Escamilla, Lincoln Public Schools director of recruitment will offer advice on navigating the hiring process and preparing for a teaching career. Dr. Calvin Krogman, a high school mathematics teacher at Isanti Community School will discuss building relationships and fostering a sense of community in the classroom.

Members can register at www.nsea.org/AEFallWebinar.

Meanwhile, NSEA-AE chapters across Nebraska are tackling food insecurity through a statewide service project. Chapters are encouraged to organize food drives on their campuses and donate collected items to local food banks, shelters and school backpack programs. Members can also partner with campus organizations, set up collection boxes at meetings or host events where food donations serve as admission.

November and December will be combined into one collection period, with pancake mix and peanut butter identified as priority items. All food donations are welcome.

Chapters are asked to track donations in pounds and report their totals to makenna.bensonberger@gmail.com. The project offers future educators an opportunity to support students and families while strengthening connections within their communities.











2026 AE Delegate Assembly and Spring Conference: 1. UNL Aspiring Educators kick off the semester with a strong turnout at their first chapter meeting. 2. AE juniors practice classroom management skills while working with area fourth graders during a fitness and nutrition day sponsored by Nebraska Extension at the YMCA in Hastings. 3. UNL-AE member Campbell Keber speaks with a potential member. 4. Wayne State Chapter meeting with Elizabeth Henderson, NSEA-AE President MaKenna Benson-Berger, and Owen Elsasser. 5. Hastings College Aspiring Educators members set up for a campus membership recruitment event.

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YOUR VOTE MATTERS

PUBLIC EDUCATION CANDIDATES

All candidates were interviewed by NSEA members and earned the recommendation because of their support of public education. The General Election is Tuesday, November 3! Please VOTE!

GOVERNOR	U.S. SENATE	CD1	CD2
Lynne Walz	Dan Osborn	Chris Backemeyer	Denise Powell

LEGISLATURE

LD 02: Caitlin Knutson	LD 26: Sen. George Dungan
LD 04: Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek	LD 28: Patty Pansing Brooks
LD 08: Erin Feichtinger Josh Livingston	LD 30: Janet Bock
LD 10: Cindy Johnson	LD 32: Shay Smith
LD 12: Christy Knorr Sen. Merv Riepe	LD 34: Ben Blodgett
LD 14: SuAnn Witt	LD 36: Darin Tompkins
LD 16: Cindy Chatt	LD 38: Janell Anderson Ehrke
LD 18: Jess Goldoni	LD 41: Jeremy Heneger
LD 20: Sen. John Fredrickson	LD 46: Sen. Danielle Conrad

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District 6: Grady Erickson

District 8: Sherrye Hutcherson

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