

The VOICE

Nebraska Education Association • October 2026



Keeping Language Alive

***Santee Education Association Member
Connects Language, Culture and Community***

• Bargaining Watch:
Protecting Members

• Election 2026: NSEA
Recommended Candidates

• Nebraska Rankings
and Estimates



Nebraska State Education Association
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
www.nsea.org
402-475-7611 • 1-800-742-0047
Volume 80, No. 2
ISSN Number: 1085-0783
USPS Number: 000-369

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Official publication of the Nebraska State Education Association, 605 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to NSEA Voice, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Published 9 times yearly according to this schedule: October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May and August.

Payment of annual NSEA membership dues entitles Nebraska educators to receive *The Voice*. Total cost of producing 9 monthly issues of *The Voice* each year is less than \$2 per member.

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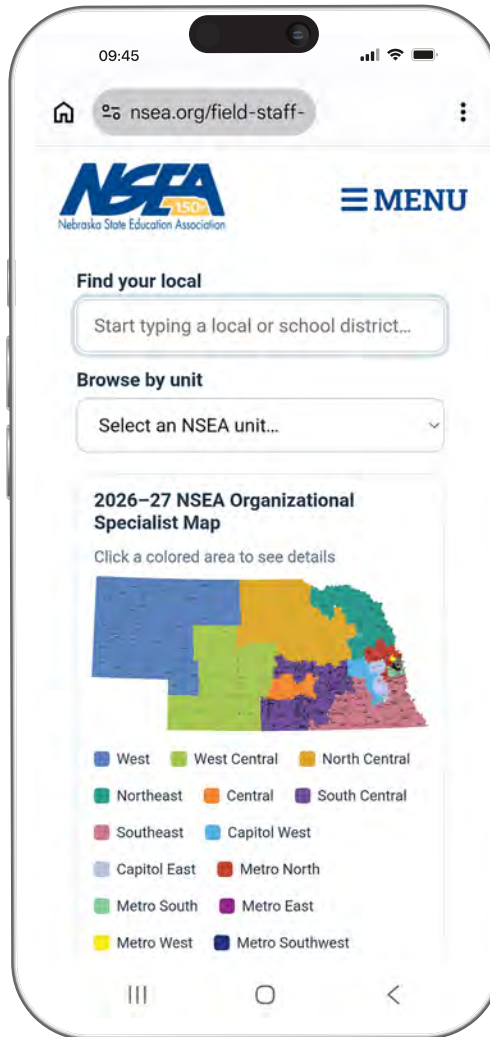


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Wondering who represents you at Nebraska State Education Association or who to contact when you need help? NSEA's interactive maps make it easy to find the people who are there to support you.

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No need to hunt through directories or wonder who to call. The maps put your NSEA team just a few clicks away. Check them out at nsea.org/nsea-team and get to know the people representing you!

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: Inspired by his grandfather's story, Santee Education Association member Calvin Krogman helped lead NSEA's effort to preserve generational languages and the connections they carry across generations. Read the story on pages 7-8.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

The Work Starts Now

Your Voice in November

That brings me to one of the most important things you can do this fall to strengthen public education in Nebraska: VOTE.

Across the state, NSEA members have interviewed candidates about the issues that matter to educators, students and public schools. The candidates recommended by the NSEA have gone through this member-driven process, helping ensure our recommendations reflect the priorities of educators. You can find more details and information about each candidate on pages 12-15.

This November, voters will choose leaders from governor to those in the Legislature, as well as local school boards, who will make decisions about school funding, recruitment and retention, working conditions and other issues that directly affect our schools.

As educators, you understand what our schools need because you live it every day. Cast your ballot, and encourage your family, friends and colleagues to make their voices heard too.

It's All Connected

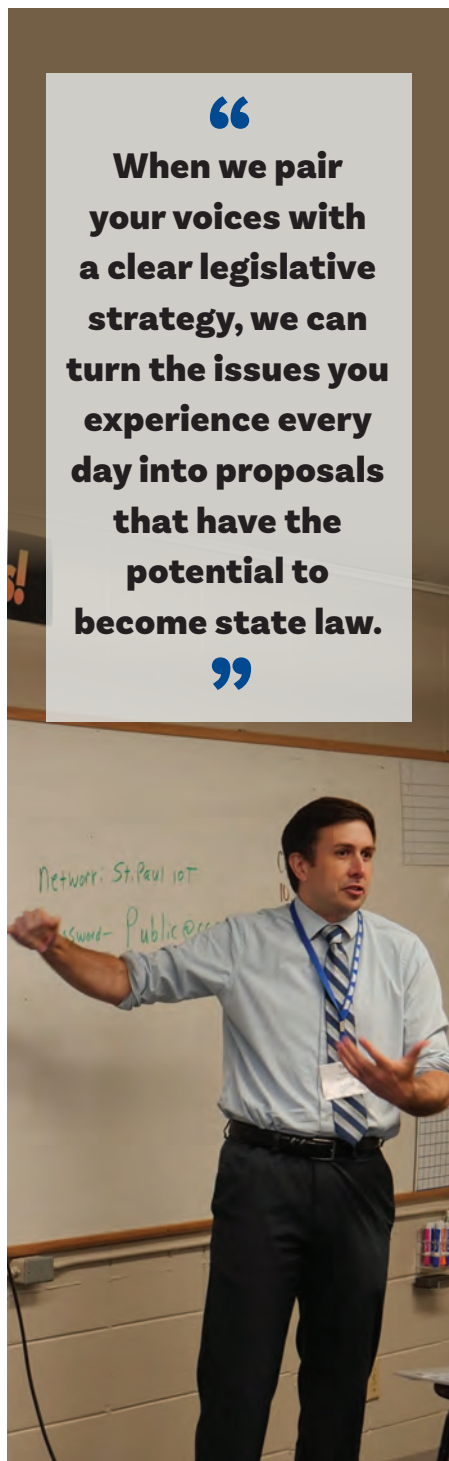
All of these pieces are connected. We listen to you and use your experiences to shape our legislative agenda. We work with lawmakers to turn those priorities into legislation. Then members across Nebraska use their voices to advocate for those bills and hold elected officials accountable for the decisions they make.

We have seen what can happen when strong advocacy and member action come together, and we have an opportunity to build on that momentum in 2027. When we combine an engaged membership with a clear education agenda, we can make the upcoming legislative session one that delivers real results for Nebraska students, educators and communities.

“

When we pair your voices with a clear legislative strategy, we can turn the issues you experience every day into proposals that have the potential to become state law.

”



As we settle into fall and prepare for trick-or-treating, here at the NSEA we are already looking ahead to January.

That is when a new Nebraska Legislature will convene and hundreds of bills will be introduced. We are meeting with senators and other stakeholders to make sure the needs of Nebraska educators and public schools are part of the conversation from the start.

Your Voice, Our Agenda

For the third year in a row, we are surveying members across the state to help shape NSEA's legislative agenda for the upcoming session. We want to hear what you are seeing in your schools, what challenges you are facing and what changes would make a meaningful difference for you and your students.

The power of that input is being felt. State senators are calling us and asking about our priorities before we have even finished gathering your feedback because they want to know what Nebraska educators want addressed.

That is what happens when thousands of educators consistently speak up about the challenges facing our schools. When we pair your voices with a clear legislative strategy, we can turn the issues you experience every day into proposals that have the potential to become state law.

We will once again stand alongside senators carrying legislation designed to address the needs of educators and strengthen public education. We will introduce our slate of bills and make clear what we hope to accomplish during the 2027 legislative session. By then, we will also know the outcome of the November election and who will be at the Capitol to help carry this work forward.



REMINDER! Check Your Paycheck

Employees and employers share responsibility for ensuring paychecks are accurate. While errors are uncommon, clerical mistakes can result in overpayment or underpayment and create financial hardship for school employees.

Local associations should encourage members, especially those who are new members, to review their first paycheck of each school year and assist them in verifying salary calculations. Catching errors early can prevent larger problems later.

If a discrepancy is found, members should contact their NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.



MOVED? Have Your Contact Details Changed?

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

To do so, log on to www.nsea.org and click on the 'For Members' on the top right side of the home page.

Then click on the blue 'Member Update' button in the center of the next screen, and follow the directions. Keep your issue of *The Voice* near, as the mailing label includes your membership number which you will need to access your information.

TEACHING AG, FEEDING KIDS



Ag Sack Lunch Program

For the 17th year, the Ag Sack Lunch Program will offer Nebraska fourth graders an opportunity to learn about agriculture through in-person and virtual presentations.

The in-person program provides students visiting the Nebraska State Capitol with a free lunch featuring Nebraska-produced foods and a 25-minute lesson on the role agriculture plays in the state's economy, including crops and livestock raised in Nebraska. Students also receive a deck of cards featuring agriculture facts.

Classrooms not planning a Capitol visit can participate virtually, with the same interactive presentation and agriculture fact cards.

Reservations can be made online by visiting agsacklunchprogram.com.

The Ag Sack Lunch Program is sponsored by the Nebraska Corn Board, Nebraska Soybean Board, Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Nebraska Cattlemen's Foundation, Nebraska Wheat Board, Nebraska Poultry Industries and Midwest Dairy.

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Every Voice, Every Language

Article by Lee Perez

Imagine a child walking into school on his first day. He isn't sure what he's walking into, but he's eager and anxious. He speaks Spanish at home, but he's ready to work on his English. The class is full of children chattering in both languages, but when the teacher enters, she scolds the child and his peers for speaking Spanish. She swings a ruler, drawing blood from his knuckles.

This was my father's painful story. It is not so different from some classrooms today, where corporal punishment may be infrequent but efforts to dissuade children's multilingualism persist. No child should ever be penalized for knowing multiple languages, especially in a country as culturally and linguistically diverse as the United States, a nation of immigrants.

The History of English-only Efforts

There have been many attempts to implement English-only policies in the U.S. While most official attempts have failed or been reversed, beliefs about the "right" language to speak continue to shape classrooms into places where multilingual immigrant students can feel unwelcome, unsafe and excluded.

More than half of Americans strongly support making English the nation's official language, according to a Pew Research Center survey. Yet the nation's founders did not establish an official language. Multilingual speakers of French, German, Indigenous languages and many others helped form the new nation.

In 1780, John Adams proposed creating an institution for "refining, correcting, improving and ascertaining the English Language." The proposal was not adopted.

The English-only movement nonetheless persisted. California, Massachusetts and Arizona adopted English-only education mandates in the late 1990s and early 2000s that restricted instruction for multilingual learners. California and Massachusetts later reversed course, restoring

greater support for bilingual and dual-language programs. Arizona has more recently loosened some restrictions.

Even as policies have changed, the rhetoric behind them remains.

What I Hear as an Educator

When I became the first English as a Second Language teacher to be named Nebraska Teacher of the Year in 2022, I heard firsthand evidence that English-only sentiments are alive and well.

During my year of service, I spoke at events across Nebraska and the nation and heard painful stories from immigrant students who were forbidden from speaking any language but English in the classroom.

One immigrant student from Cuba told me English-only attitudes made her a target for racist bullying and harassment. Her teachers would allow her to speak only English, not Spanish. The bullying became so severe that she pretended to be sick to avoid school. Her attendance suffered, her grades declined and she began to feel as though she did not belong in the U.S.

During my tour of Nebraska, I also heard several teachers express the belief that schools should be English-speaking only.

The Consequences for Students

In March 2025, President Donald Trump signed an executive order designating English as the official language of the United States. The administration said the policy was intended to "promote unity" and "cultivate a shared American culture for all citizens."

For immigrant students, however, the broader climate surrounding language and immigration can have consequences in schools. A national survey from the UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access found that more than one-third of U.S. public high school principals reported students from immigrant families had experienced bullying or harassment at their schools.

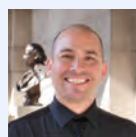
These attitudes do more than stigmatize children in the classroom. They can contribute to a broader sense among linguistically and culturally diverse families that they do not belong.

Immigration enforcement and the fear surrounding it have also affected school attendance. In my own community, attendance issues among immigrant students have been the worst I have seen in my 20 years as an ESL teacher.

Language is Part of Us

My father's painful story should feel like a distant past, not a reflection of what immigrant students still experience today. Yet multilingual children continue to be made to feel that a fundamental part of their identity does not belong in the classroom.

Our schools should reject English-only rhetoric and embrace the linguistic diversity that has long been part of this nation. Our immigrant students deserve to feel safe, valued, empowered and heard in every language they speak.



This article was written by NSEA member Lee Perez, an English as a Second Language teacher with 20 years of experience teaching multilingual learners. In 2022, he became the first ESL teacher named Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

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Dr. Calvin Krogman, a math teacher at Isanti Community School on the Santee Sioux Reservation, helped advance an NSEA resolution aimed at preserving generational knowledge, language and traditions.

Keeping Language Alive

Santee Education Association's Krogman Preserves Language, Culture

In the final days of life, we do not reach for the things we learned last. We return to what found us first.

Before the lives we built for ourselves, before the lessons learned in classrooms and the jargon picked up in workplaces, there are older things, rooted deeper: the voices that raised us, the words that shaped us and the language that first taught us who we were.

Those who work in palliative and memory care know this, too: When memory begins to fade and the world narrows, those first words can become the last ones left.

When Wayne Evans lost his English, his Lakota remained.

What We Carry Forward

Evans, born in rural South Dakota in 1938 to a Lakota mother and an immigrant father, learned the Lakota language as a child. But he learned it quietly.

His grandson, Dr. Calvin Krogman, a high school math teacher at Isanti Community School on the Santee Sioux Reservation, shared that story with delegates at NSEA's Delegate

Assembly this spring. It was the Lakota spoken "in whispered tones behind closed doors," Krogman said, because children could be beaten if their teachers heard them speaking it.

Decades later, after Evans suffered a stroke, his ability to use and understand English began to disappear. The language he had been discouraged from speaking as a child did not.

"In his final days, Lakota was all he knew and Lakota was all he understood," Krogman said.

The effort to silence the language had worked. Evans' Lakota had not been passed down to the generations gathered around him in his final days.

"His last words echoed in a hospital room among family who had never had the opportunity to know the language," Krogman said.

For Krogman, a member of NSEA's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC), that moment became part of a much larger story about what can disappear when a language is interrupted between generations.

More Than Words

In May, Krogman stood before

delegates on behalf of EMAC to introduce a new NSEA resolution on preserving generational languages, defined in the resolution as languages spoken in the home other than English.

The resolution calls for access to professional development in cross-linguistic and multilingual education for school personnel and recognizes language preservation as foundational to cultural identity.

Language, the resolution says, connects generations. Through it come family histories, relationships with elders, traditions, stories, knowledge and even the recipes that find their way from one kitchen to the next.

Krogman made that idea tangible.

"It does not matter whether it's Lakota or Spanish or German or Dutch or Russian," he told delegates.

Maybe it is a cookbook written in German. An inscription from a great-grandmother in Dutch. A Norwegian family name.

Languages, Krogman said, "give a connection to something that goes far beyond who we are as an individual, but to who we are as a people."

When the Chain Is Broken

As Nebraska educators prepare to recognize Native American Heritage Month in November, Krogman's family story underscores what can be lost when a language is silenced and what can be preserved when a new generation is given the opportunity to learn it.

For generations of Native families, however, that chain was not simply allowed to fade. It was deliberately broken.

Federal Indian boarding schools were created as instruments of assimilation, separating Native children from their families, communities, cultures and languages. Nebraska was home to one of them.

In September, EMAC members visited the site of the Genoa Indian Industrial School, which opened in 1884 on former Pawnee Reservation land. Children from more than 40 tribal nations attended the school during its 50 years of operation.

Its mission was explicit: to replace traditional American Indian ways of life with mainstream American culture.

Children, some as young as 4, were removed or coerced away from their families and could remain separated from their communities for years. Students lived under strict, military-style regimentation, harsh discipline and demanding labor.

At least 86 children are known to have died while attending Genoa Indian Industrial School.

Reclaiming What Remains

Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Title VI Indian Education Program Director/NICE TLC with Omaha Public Schools Administrators and an EMAC member, spoke in support of the generational languages resolution at the 2026 Delegate Assembly.

"Language is culture, period," she told delegates.

Her mother attended a boarding school and speaks her first language fluently. But that language was not fully passed to Hartman-Bradley.

"That wasn't passed on because it was beaten out of them," she said.

Christina Running Hawk Ellison, an Oglala Lakota educator with Omaha Public Schools, described another version of the same interruption. Her grandparents and father attended



Christina Running Hawk Ellison, an Oglala Lakota educator, speaks in support of the generational languages resolution at NSEA's 2026 Delegate Assembly.



Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Title VI Indian Education Program Director/NICE TLC, with Omaha Public Schools Administrators, speaks at NSEA's 2026 Delegate Assembly.

boarding schools. They spoke Lakota fluently when she was young, but she learned only some words.

Today, she uses what she remembers with her own children and in classrooms.

"I try to use what other little pieces" remain," she told delegates.

Those pieces matter. Preserving a language means more than protecting vocabulary. It can mean restoring relationships between generations and giving young people access to knowledge previous generations were discouraged, punished or prevented from passing along. Increasingly, educators are becoming part of that work.

Hartman-Bradley told delegates that Omaha Public Schools is working toward introducing Indigenous language instruction, with plans for a Ho-Chunk language pilot program in 2027.

It is an effort, she said, to give language back to children.

Delegates adopted Resolution D-14

in May, adding the preservation of generational languages to NSEA's resolutions.

For Krogman, preserving generational languages is not about keeping something frozen in the past. It is about ensuring that which survived can continue moving forward.

"The value of this resolution is in knowing that no one's words will die with them," Krogman said.

When his grandfather lost his English, his Lakota remained. What did not survive intact was the path for those words to reach the generations gathered around him.

A language can hold a story. It can carry a prayer, a recipe, a memory, a way of understanding the world or the last words of someone you love.

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NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas presents during an NSEA STRONG Summer Conference.

Bargaining Watch: Protecting Members, Preparing for Negotiations

As bargaining season approaches, local associations across Nebraska are preparing to bring member priorities to the table.

Better pay, affordable benefits, safe working conditions, plan time and resources for students may all be part of those conversations. But strong bargaining begins well before negotiations start.

NSEA Collective Bargaining Specialist Jen Dubas said fall is the time for local associations to organize, gather member input and prepare. K-12 and community college bargaining teams should be ready to begin negotiations by Nov. 1.

Start With Member Voices

Member input helps local associations identify bargaining priorities, from salaries and health insurance to class size, plan time and other working conditions.

Accurate employee information helps organizers reach educators and make sure members have opportunities to weigh in. But Dubas cautions leaders against sharing association membership information with administrators.

"There are certainly concerns about how sharing this could result in potential misuse for both members and non-members," Dubas said. "If your administration or school board asks for a list of members, or if they ask how many members you have, you do not have to share that information."

Local associations should also make sure recognition or certification requirements are in place and work with their NSEA organizational specialist for guidance on deadlines, area settlements and bargaining resources.

An Issue to Watch: Subcontracting

Subcontracting is increasingly on the radar of local associations. During a collective bargaining roundtable at NSEA's STRONG Summer Conference in Gering, members raised concerns about substitute teachers, paraprofessionals and other positions being turned over to

private companies.

NSEA Director of Advocacy Jason Wiese said locals should look beyond the initial cost of a subcontracting proposal.

"Subcontracting can look like a simple solution on paper, but local associations need to look beyond the initial price tag," Wiese said. "The real question is what a district may be giving up in return, from experienced employees and workplace protections to accountability and continuity for students."

The issue is already playing out in Nebraska. Lincoln Public Schools recently partnered with staffing company ESS to manage its long-term substitute program, making participating substitutes employees of ESS rather than the district.

A change in employer can affect access to retirement benefits, association protections and other workplace protections. Local associations should watch school board agendas, budget discussions and staffing proposals for signs that outsourcing is being considered.

October Preparation is Critical

State law establishes a firm schedule for bargaining activities, making October a critical month for preparation. K-12 and community college locals should be ready to begin negotiations by Nov. 1.

Dubas recommends locals survey members, organize bargaining teams, assign roles and address recognition or certification requirements. Locals can also use NSEA's microsearch database of negotiated agreements at nsea.org/collective-bargaining to research settlements and contract language.

NSEA organizational specialists can help locals navigate deadlines, analyze proposals and prepare for issues at the table. Whether the conversation is about salaries, plan time, health insurance, class size or subcontracting, preparation begins with listening to members.

RANKINGS & ESTIMATES

SCHOOL REVENUE

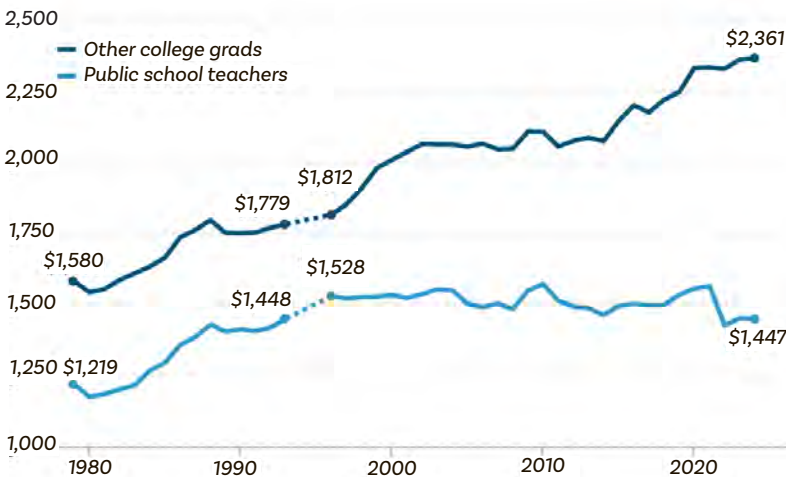


The federal share of school revenue declined to 7.8% of total revenue receipts in 2024-25, due to the winding down of federal COVID relief funds.

Correspondingly, shares of state and local funding in 2024-25 increased to 47.2% and 45.0%, respectively.

Teachers Earn Less Than Their College-Educated Peers

Since 1996, teacher wages have fallen 5.3%, while wages for other college graduates have risen more than 30%, adjusted for inflation.



Figures show average weekly wages, adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars, for public school teachers and other college graduates.

Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data, 1979-2024. Wages adjusted for inflation to 2024 dollars.

What makes a difference

According to the new reports, K-12 teachers earn 24% more, on average, in states with collective bargaining.

Collective Bargaining Law

No Collective Bargaining Law

Average Salary



Chart: Salary averages are weighted by the number of teachers in each state.
Source: Rankings of the States 2025 and Estimates of School Statistics 2026.

NEBRASKA

AVERAGE TEACHER SALARY

\$63,326²
#34
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE TEACHER STARTING SALARY

\$39,561¹
#50
IN THE NATION

TEACHER PAY GAP

76¢³

MIN. LIVING WAGE

\$66,393⁴

AVERAGE ESP EARNINGS

\$32,777⁵
#38
IN THE NATION

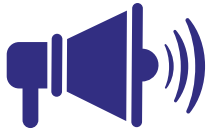
PER STUDENT SPENDING

\$16,788⁶
#28
IN THE NATION

AVERAGE HIGHER ED FACULTY SALARY

\$98,369⁷
#29
IN THE NATION

1. NEA Teacher Salary Benchmark Report, FY 2024-25, April 2026.
2. State Rankings, FY 2024-25, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, August 2026.
3. Compared with college-educated, nonteaching peers. Economic Policy Institute, September 2025.
4. Income needed for family of one adult and one child to have a modest but adequate standard of living in the most affordable metro area, 2025 dollars, Economic Policy Institute.
5. Average K-12 ESP Earnings, FY 2024-25, NEA Education Support Professional Earnings Report, April 2026.
6. Current expenditure per student in fall enrollment. State Rankings, FY 2024-25, NEA Rankings & Estimates Report, August 2026.
7. Average Faculty Salary for Four-Year Public Institutions, FY 2024-25, NEA Higher Education Faculty Salary Analysis, April 2026.



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!



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GOVERNOR

Lynne Walz

Former State Sen. Lynne Walz, who represented Legislative District 15 from 2017 to 2025, previously worked as a 4th and 5th grade teacher in Fremont Public Schools. During her time in the Legislature, she chaired the Education Committee from 2021 to 2023 and sponsored several pro-education bills, including one focused on school safety. Walz's priorities include uniting Nebraskans, respecting voters' will, strengthening schools and improving affordability in housing, childcare and healthcare.

U.S. SENATE

Dan Osborn

Dan Osborn, perhaps best known for his leadership during the 2021 Kellogg's strike, which helped secure better wages and benefits for workers, is set to challenge U.S. Sen. Pete Ricketts for one of Nebraska's two Senate seats. A staunch unionist, Osborn emphasizes the importance of a strong, protected labor force. He also highlights the value of robust public schools, noting that public education "has played a crucial role throughout American history in leveling the playing field."

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 1

Chris Backemeyer

Chris Backemeyer, a Lincoln native, joined the U.S. State Department following the 9/11 attacks and eventually went on to serve on the White House National Security Council and as an adviser in the Executive Office of the Vice President. He emphasized to the NSEA interview committee that he is running for Congress to protect and strengthen public schools. He pointed to his work as a negotiator for the U.S. State Department as allowing him to work with everyone, regardless of political ideology, to help Nebraskans.

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 2

Denise Powell

Denise Powell is a working mom and small business owner that is running to lower costs, make

healthcare more affordable and strengthen our public schools. The NSEA interview committee was pleased with Powell's commitment to investing in our public schools, increasing support for teachers and school staff and keeping taxpayer money in public schools, among several other key issues.

NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

District 2

Caitlin Knutson

Caitlin Knutson, an east Lincoln resident, has long advocated for public education. After earning her master's degrees in education and special education, she spent 15 years as a special education teacher before working with youth in the Drug and Alcohol Program and the Adolescent Boys and Girls YRTC in Hastings and Lincoln. She supports paid FMLA for teachers, improved classroom safety and preserving collective bargaining and fair dismissal. A former member of the Omaha Education Association, she served on its board and political action committee.

Sen. Rob Clements, the current LD2 representative, is term-limited.

District 4

Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek

Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek, first recommended by NSEA in the 2022 election cycle, is vying again for the Legislative District 4 seat. Maxwell-Ostdiek currently operates a small insurance and financial services business with her husband, Fred. She also serves as the president of Better Ballots Nebraska and is a board member for Nonpartisan Nebraska. Her campaign priorities include ensuring that public schools have the necessary resources to set Nebraska's youth up for success, supporting workers and small businesses, and respecting and defending the voices of voters in the Legislature.

District 8

Erin Feichtinger & Josh Livingston

Erin Feichtinger, of Omaha, currently serves as the Policy Director for the Women's Fund of Omaha, a role that has given her extensive experience in legislative affairs. Prior to her current role, Feichtinger built

the Advocacy and Policy Program at Together, a nonprofit dedicated to homelessness and hunger. If elected, Feichtinger seeks to protect and strengthen public education, improve affordability in housing and healthcare and protect the rights of Nebraskans.

Josh Livingston, a family law attorney from Omaha, previously served as the Douglas County Deputy County Attorney. Josh seeks to protect the will of the people against legislative attacks, fully fund public education and provide for affordable housing. The local interview team noted that Livingston supports public education and the mission of the NSEA, knows how to navigate political systems and is open to collaboration on legislation.

Sen. Megan Hunt, the current LD8 representative, is term-limited.

District 10

Cindy Johnson

Cindy Johnson, a resident of Omaha, currently serves on the Learning Community of Douglas/Sarpy County Coordinating Council, representing District 1. Johnson spent over 20 years working as an audiologist in Norfolk and Omaha, and she continues to teach hearing science to students at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Johnson's priorities include maintaining local control when it comes to curriculum decisions, appropriating state funding for school supplies and keeping public dollars out of private schools. The local interview team described Johnson as personable, likeable and honest.

Sen. Wendy DeBoer, the current LD10 representative, is term-limited.

District 12

Christy Knorr & Sen. Merv Riepe

Sen. Merv Riepe, first elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 2014 and again in 2022, is seeking reelection to the Ralston and Millard-area seat. In recent years, Sen. Riepe has proven to be a critical vote against private school vouchers. The NSEA interview committee noted Sen. Riepe's support for providing more protection for educators and building up respect for teachers among his colleagues in the Legislature.

Christy Knorr, a hospice nurse and community advocate, is running for

2026 General Election Preview

Legislature to lower costs, protect paid sick leave for Nebraska workers and strengthen public schools. The NSEA interview committee stated that Knorr was excited for the opportunity to work with educators and the NSEA if elected to the Legislature.

District 14 Susan Witt

SuAnn Witt, a native of Sarpy County, began her career in Omaha Public Schools, working in managerial and support roles. After working for OPS for over 35 years, Witt moved to the Nebraska Department of Education, where she worked for 13 years as State E-Rate Coordinator and Rule 89 Program Manager. Witt currently serves as a member of the Papillion-La Vista Community Schools Board. The NSEA candidate interview team stated that education is a deeply ingrained facet of Witt's life.

Speaker of the Legislature John Arch, who currently represents LD14, is term-limited.

District 16 Cindy Chatt

Cindy Chatt, a native of Tekamah, is the owner and founder of Chatterbox Brews. She currently serves as Director of Burt County Economic Development, where Chatt works to revitalize communities across Burt County. The NSEA candidate interview committee noted that Chatt has a proven track record in economic development, is highly personable and would be a strong advocate for public education in the Nebraska Legislature.

Sen. Ben Hansen, the current LD16 representative, is term-limited.

District 18 Jess Goldoni

Jess Goldoni, an Omaha business owner and AI strategist, brings more than 20 years of experience in workforce development, budgeting, strategic planning, technology and communications to the Legislative District 18 race. Goldoni taught at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and continues to educate businesses and communities about AI today. Education is also personal to her; Goldoni's stepfather taught in District 66 for more than 30 years. If elected, she will focus on strengthening public education, recruiting and retaining teachers, and building

stronger partnerships between schools, community colleges and Nebraska industries.

District 20 Sen. John Fredrickson

Sen. John Fredrickson, who was first elected to the Legislature in 2022, has proven to be a champion for public education and educator rights. From repeatedly voting to block pro-voucher legislation to supporting the mental health of teachers and students, Fredrickson has consistently been a strong advocate for public education. Most recently, in 2025, Sen. Fredrickson worked with NSEA to hold a very successful roundtable to examine the adequacy of funding and resources available to Level 3 facilities. The 2022 NSEA candidate interview team noted that Fredrickson was an honest hard-worker who is very passionate about public service.

District 26 Sen. George Dungan

Sen. George Dungan, first elected to the Legislature in 2022, has promoted several pieces of pro-education legislation, including two bills that would have established forgivable loan and scholarship programs for special education teachers. Sen. Dungan's campaign priorities include ensuring public schools are adequately funded, improving the lives of working families and lowering the cost of healthcare. The 2022 NSEA candidate interview team described Dungan as a strong communicator and a staunch advocate for public schools.

District 28 Former Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks

Former state Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, who previously served in the Legislature from 2015 to 2023, is gearing up to return. During her time in the Legislature, Pansing Brooks carried a handful of education bills, including one that added more supports for students with dyslexia. Another would have expanded the definition of multicultural education to incorporate the histories, perspectives and contributions of several cultures and required the State Department of Education to hire a multicultural education specialist. During her 2022 Congressional run, Pansing Brooks was described as valuing the fundamental

principle that everyone deserves dignity, care, safety and opportunity.

Sen. Jane Raybould, the current LD28 representative, is not seeking reelection.

District 32 Shay Smith

Shay Smith, a resident of Crete, holds strong ties to her local community. Besides working as an attorney, Shay serves on the Board of the Blue River Arts Council and the Crete Rotary Club, previously chaired the local Toys for Tots program and volunteered as a Teammates Mentor. The NSEA candidate interview committee noted that Shay deeply understands the important partnership between public schools and the health of a community. Shay's campaign priorities include lowering the cost of living, investing in public education and taking action against high property taxes.

Sen. Tom Brandt, the current LD32 representative, is term-limited.

District 34 Ben Blodgett

Central City resident Ben Blodgett has spent his career as an inside wireman electrician, giving him insight into the challenges facing agricultural producers, manufacturing workers and working families. Ben aims to foster strong communities not only in his legislative district, but across Nebraska. If elected, he will work to strengthen the competitiveness of Nebraska's economy, support strong public schools and promote fiscal responsibility and accountability in government.

District 36 Darin Tompkins

Before retiring, Papillion native Darin Tompkins worked for more than 30 years in science-based manufacturing, spending 12 years managing an animal health vaccine manufacturing plant. Tompkins, in his NSEA candidate questionnaire, noted that the first and most important step to strengthening Nebraska's public schools is to provide local districts with a reliable and stable revenue source. The 2026 NSEA candidate interview committee noted that Tompkins holds strong union values, is an advocate for protecting the will of Nebraska's voters and has a strong work ethic. Tompkins' priorities include expanding access to affordable healthcare, strengthening

2026 General Election Preview

public schools and protecting local control.

District 38 **Janell Anderson Ehrke**

Janell Anderson Ehrke is the founder and CEO of GROW Nebraska, a nonprofit organization that assists small business owners with obtaining the resources they need to grow and thrive in their local communities. The NSEA interview committee lauded Janell for already having actionable ideas for legislation to increase state revenue to public schools and incentivize educators to remain in the profession.

Sen. Dave Murman, who currently represents LD38, is term-limited.

District 41 **Jeremy Heneger**

Dr. Jeremy Heneger, a former educator with South Central Unified School District, currently serves as a policy analyst for ACT Education Corp. If elected, Heneger's priorities

include increasing access to mental health services for all Nebraskans, ending hunger in schools and ensuring that public funds remain invested in public schools. The NSEA interview committee highlighted Heneger's educational experience in faculty and administrative positions, providing him with a robust knowledge of the issues impacting educators and students.

Sen. Fred Meyer, the current LD41 representative, is not seeking reelection.

District 46 **Sen. Danielle Conrad**

Sen. Danielle Conrad, who served in the Nebraska Legislature from 2007 to 2015, and again from 2022 to the present day, has worked tirelessly to protect and strengthen public education throughout her long tenure. Conrad has carried a number of bills supporting students and educators, including two that provided scholarships for children of law enforcement officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty. In 2025, Conrad also introduced a bill to

provide special education teachers with four "paperwork leave days" per year. If reelected, Sen. Conrad will continue to fight for public education.

DOUGLAS & SARPY **COUNTIES** **Learning Community of** **Douglas & Sarpy Counties** **Sarah Dragon**

Sarah Dragon, an NSEA Board member and lifelong educator and school psychologist, is running for a seat on the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties Coordinating Council in Subcouncil 5. She wants to invest more in elementary-age children, increase partnerships with families in the district and across the metro area and strengthen community programs provided by the Learning Community. If elected, Dragon seeks to ensure every child in Subcouncil 5 has the tools and support necessary to thrive academically.

NEBRASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



CONWAY

District 5 **Michaela Conway**

Michaela Conway is a mom of five public school students, a business systems manager and a member of the Crete Public Schools Board of Education. Conway's priorities include improving literacy and academic outcomes, strengthening teacher recruitment and retention efforts and ensuring that the State Board of Education remains transparent and accountable in its work and decision making.

Kirk Penner, who currently represents the district, is not seeking reelection.



ERICKSON

District 6 **Grady Erickson**

Grady Erickson, an attorney and Grand Island native, holds strong ties to public education. Although not a teacher himself, Erickson's parents both worked as special education teachers with Grand Island Public Schools, and his grandmother served as a principal in Plainview Public Schools. Erickson is committed to supporting public education and educators and ensuring that every student in District 6 has the opportunity to succeed.



HUTCHERSON

District 8 **Sherrye Hutcherson**

Sherrye Hutcherson, the executive vice president of Bellevue University, is running for State Board of Education to focus on improving literacy and graduation rates, increase investments in early childhood education and reducing chronic absenteeism. Before joining Bellevue University, Hutcherson worked for Union Pacific and Omaha Public Power District.

Deb Neary, who currently represents the district, is not seeking reelection.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA BOARD OF REGENTS



COMSTOCK

District 1 Brent Comstock

Brent Comstock is the founder and CEO of BCom, an advertising and marketing firm. Comstock also serves on the boards of the Lincoln Public Schools Foundation and Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation. Comstock's priorities include keeping tuition affordable, creating new partnerships between the University of Nebraska and local employers, and increasing accountability as well as transparency in the Board of Regents.



HOSEIN

District 1 Jeremy Hosein

Dr. Jeremy Hosein is a neurosurgeon at Neurological and Spinal Surgery. Hosein previously served as a senior policy advisor to the governor and a White House fellow. Hosein's priorities include creating an "NIL for Academics" to award academic achievement, increasing support for students and faculty and expanding access to higher education for Nebraskans.



BUTLER

District 2 Elizabeth Butler

Elizabeth Butler of Papillion currently serves as a member of the Papillion-La Vista School Board. Simultaneously, Elizabeth works as the Clerk of the City of Omaha, a role that has given her considerable experience in the machinations of state and local government and policymaking. If elected, Butler will work to increase efficiency in the University System and provide savings to taxpayers.



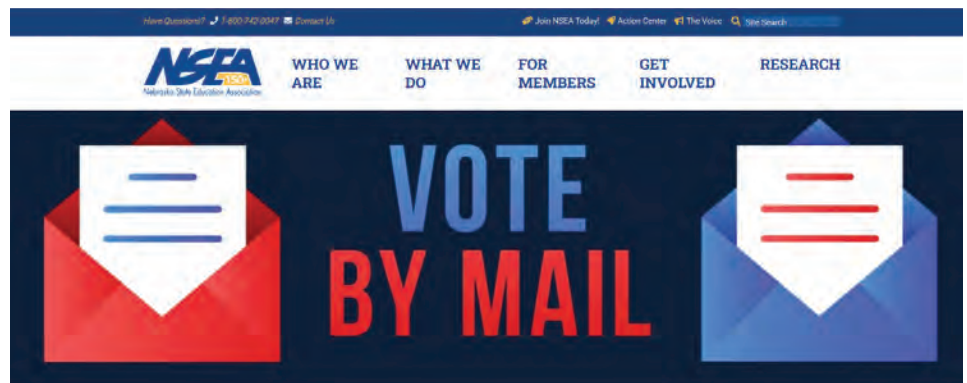
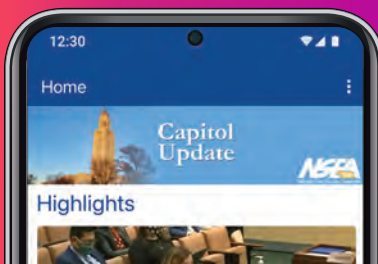
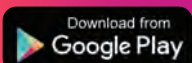
SOLOMON

District 4 Justin Solomon

Justin Solomon is the COO of Integrated Life Choices, a human services organization dedicated to supporting Nebraskans with disabilities. Justin previously served as a UNL Student Regent, and is the current treasurer of CASA for Douglas County. His priorities include protecting research and academic freedom and ensuring that the University of Nebraska is affordable for working families.

Download the NSEA Capitol Update App!

- Receive alerts and calls-to-action during the legislative session.
- Stay up-to-date on events and education news from the Nebraska Legislature.



Election 2026: Make Your Voice Heard

From your local school board to the state Legislature, elected officials make decisions that directly affect Nebraska educators, students and public schools.

The NSEA helps members make informed choices through a member-led candidate recommendation process. Members review candidates' positions on education issues, interview participating candidates and make recommendations based on issues affecting public education.

For the most up-to-date list of NSEA-recommended candidates, visit nsea.org/vote2026 or scan the QR code on this page.





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Schroer



Wiesen



Fielder



Tystad



Eickhoff



Vo

Departures and retirements lead to changes

After 35 years of service to NSEA, Patty Schroer, assistant to the associate executive director, retired this summer. During her tenure, Schroer played an important role in keeping NSEA operations running smoothly, overseeing building management and helping coordinate the association's annual Delegate Assembly. Her work behind the scenes helped ensure NSEA members, leaders and staff had the support and resources needed to carry out the association's work.

Taking over for Schroer is Chris Garcia, who has been with NSEA for three years as an organizational specialist associate. Garcia brings experience working with NSEA staff, members and local associations to her new role.

Also retiring this summer was longtime organizational specialist Mike Wiesen, who concluded more than 25 years with NSEA. The longest-serving organizational

specialist on staff at the time of his retirement, Wiesen brought decades of experience supporting educators and local associations across the state. Most recently, he worked with the Omaha Education Association, NSEA's largest local association. Wiesen's extensive knowledge, experience and commitment to NSEA members made him a valued resource to educators and association leaders throughout his career.

NSEA organizational specialists Patrick Fielder and Todd Tystad also recently resigned from their positions with the association. Fielder departed after four years with NSEA, while Tystad resigned after eight years. During their time with NSEA, both supported members and local associations through organizing, bargaining, member advocacy and workplace issues.

NSEA has also welcomed two new organizational specialists, Cassie

Eickhoff and Travis Vo. Both bring classroom experience and backgrounds in local association leadership to their new roles.

Eickhoff, a 13-year veteran educator and 15-year coach, most recently worked in Beatrice, where she was a member of the Beatrice Education Association. A former English teacher, Eickhoff is also a novelist whose debut novel, *Life After Eve*, was published in 2026. She has been assigned to NSEA's South Central Unit.

Vo most recently taught at Bonn International School in Bonn, Germany. Before teaching abroad, he served on the NSEA Board of Directors and worked as a technology paraeducator at Westside Community Schools and as director of technology at Marian High School in Omaha. Vo will serve members and local associations in NSEA's Capitol East Unit.

Who Makes a Difference in Your School?

Is there an educator, Education Support Professional, local association or education advocate whose work deserves recognition? Now is a great time to start thinking about colleagues and others you may want to nominate for an NSEA award.

Each year, NSEA recognizes outstanding educators, ESPs, local associations and friends of public education during the annual Delegate Assembly. The awards celebrate excellence in the classroom and workplace, service to communities, advocacy for public education, local association communications and efforts to advance 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 deserving individuals,

organizations and community partners for the Great Plains Milestone, Administrator of Excellence, Friend of Education and Outstanding Media awards.

NSEA's Friend of Education Award is the association's highest honor and recognizes an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or Nebraska educators.

A member-led special committee is currently reviewing the awards program and exploring ways to streamline the nomination process. More information, including nomination requirements, deadlines and submission details, will be shared in upcoming issues of *The Voice*.

For now, start the conversation in your local association. Think about the educators, colleagues and community partners whose contributions deserve to be celebrated.

The 2027 Delegate Assembly will be held April 23-24 at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

EHA: Did you know you have 24/7 access to a nurse?

Questions about your health don't always happen during business hours. That's why your EHA health plan includes access to a 24/7 nurse line, giving you the opportunity to speak with a registered nurse whenever you need guidance. This valuable resource can help you make informed decisions about your care and provide peace of mind when health concerns arise.

Whether you're caring for a sick child, managing symptoms outside of your doctor's office hours or wondering if you should seek medical attention, a nurse is available to listen and provide support. Nurses can answer questions about illnesses, symptoms, medications and general health concerns, helping you better understand your options and next steps.

The nurse line can be especially helpful when you're unsure whether a condition requires immediate treatment, a doctor's appointment or self-care at home. Having access to professional guidance around the clock can help reduce stress and give you confidence in managing your health and the health of your family.

Best of all, this service is included as part of your EHA health benefits, making trusted health information available whenever you need it.

To learn more about the My EHA app and other valuable EHA benefits, visit www.NebraskaBlue.com/EHABenefits.



No REDTAPE, 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.



nea **Member Benefits**

Student Debt Navigator

In partnership with

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1. The NEA-vetted student loan forgiveness tool for teachers provides trusted sources that give you legitimate options.
2. Calculate how much money you can save through this tool that's easy to use on your desktop or mobile device.
3. As an NEA member, you can run your numbers at no cost to see if you qualify for student loan repayment or forgiveness programs.
4. If you need additional help, you can access student loan forgiveness experts via telephone or chat.
5. Receive a complete list of relevant debt-relief programs based on your situation.
6. Prevent errors and improve your odds of qualifying for student loan forgiveness programs by e-filing your paperwork.

To learn more about the NEA Student Debt Navigator, visit www.neamb.com.



Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

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- Save on travel and everyday items
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- Sign up for free life insurance
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ISAU METES

Message from the Executive Director

The Power of Participation

Over the years, I have had many meaningful conversations with members from across the state. We have so many passionate members who give their all, day in and day out, to make a difference in students' lives. Many educators proudly talk about their students. We also swap stories of classroom management gone awry and our most embarrassing teaching moments.

Many of us used to, and I am sure many of you still do, stand outside our classroom doors during passing periods. After the last period of the day, we would linger until the hallways were clear of students. Then we would gather and reflect on our day. We used to call it "hallway therapy."

The Perfect School

Many of those conversations would turn into daydreams about the perfect school. Imagine having a gymnasium that wasn't also the multipurpose room and theater. We envisioned having more paraeducators, smaller class sizes, healthier snacks and more hands-on opportunities for students who were not necessarily college-bound. What would it be like if we had all the resources we needed, and even more, to innovate for students?

However, one thing I heard repeatedly was that politics should stay out of public education. Many members still share that sentiment. NSEA and NEA are often criticized for being too political. And I get it. I really do.

Why It Matters

But I don't think we have a choice. Nebraska school districts are political subdivisions. Each school district is governed by a school board made up of elected officials who oversee district finances and policies and hold the superintendent accountable.

School funding is inherently political. Decisions made by the Legislature, including those that shape the state aid formula, directly affect the resources available to our schools and students.

Politics is not just about party lines or single issues. It is how we advocate for our students. It is how we secure funding for special education. It is how we provide students with the healthiest food possible and ensure they are safe and supported at school.

Politics is not always about divisive debates, awkward family gatherings, picket lines or pounding fists. It is about understanding the issues that affect public education, regardless of political affiliation. It is about advocating for students and communities. It is about participating in democracy by registering to vote, staying informed and having a plan for Election Day.

Make a Plan to Vote

I am a registered voter. I have a plan for Election Day. I know where I will vote and when I will vote. I plan to cast my ballot before heading to work and that evening I will follow the election results as they come in.

As individuals, our political beliefs are our own. How involved we choose to be is entirely up to us. We will not always agree on candidates, policies or priorities, and that is part of participating in a democracy. What matters is that we pay attention to the decisions being made and understand how they affect the people and communities we serve.

As educators and advocates, we do not have the luxury of disengagement. Decisions made through the political process affect our students, our schools and our profession every day.

One of the most important things we can do for our students is vote.

Register to attend the NSEA-Retired Fall Conference



October

22

NSEA-Retired members will gather at the Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA) in Kearney for this year's Fall Conference. MONA provides a unique setting to explore Nebraska's artistic heritage and the people, places and stories that have shaped the state's culture.

The museum is home to a collection of works by artists with ties to Nebraska, offering visitors an opportunity to experience the state's history and culture through art. NSEA-Retired members will have time to explore the museum while enjoying a day of learning, conversation and connection with fellow retirees from across the state.

This year's NSEA-Retired Fall Conference is scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 22, at the Museum of Nebraska Art, 2401 Central Ave., Kearney. The event is free for all NSEA-Retired members, and guests are welcome to attend for just \$10.

To register, visit www.nsea.org/nsea-retired-fall.

Medicare Insurance Seminars are coming this fall!

Each fall, NSEA-Retired partners with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska to present informational seminars on Medicare across the state. The seminars cover the basics of Medicare, coverage options available through Educators' Medicare Supplement and how to select a Medicare Part D plan for prescription drug coverage.

For members approaching Medicare eligibility, the process can come with plenty of questions. The seminars are designed to help members better understand their options, important enrollment considerations and the decisions they may need to make as they prepare for Medicare.

Five in-person seminars are scheduled across the state this year, with dates, times and locations listed in the accompanying chart. Three additional seminars will be offered via Zoom for those unable to attend in person. The tentative Zoom dates are Nov. 4, Nov. 10 and Nov. 12.

A postcard with seminar details, including dates, times and locations, will be mailed later this fall to NSEA-Retired members between the ages of 62 and 75. Members are encouraged to watch their mail for more information and begin considering which seminar works best for their schedule. The seminar schedule is posted on www.nsea.org/retired.

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)
Norfolk	Wednesday, Nov. 11 Northeast Community College – Lifelong Learning Center, Suites F and G (701 East Benjamin Ave.)
Ogallala	Thursday, Oct. 29 Educational Service Unit 16 (314 West 1st St.)
Omaha	Thursday, Nov. 5 OPS TAC Building – Boardroom, 2nd Floor (3215 Cuming St.)
Kearney	Wednesday, Oct. 28 Educational Service Unit 10 – Room B (76 Plaza Blvd.)



Have a student teacher?

Sign them up for NSEA Aspiring Educators

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

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

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

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

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

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

Free STEM Resource Available Through NDE



Nebraska public schools can access Plasma Games, a science resource for grades 6-12, at no cost during the 2026-27 school year through funding from the Nebraska Department of Education. The platform includes interactive

activities, hands-on investigations, auto-graded assignments and STEM career experiences. Free professional development is also included. To participate, a principal or district administrator must complete an approval form at www.bit.ly/Plazma-Admin.

Plasma Games will then assist with account setup. Learn more at <https://play.plasma.games>.

Your
"Family of
Teachers"
photo here

Family of teachers

Teaching isn't just a profession. It's a legacy. Whether it's a family of educators spanning generations or a new tradition in the making, "Family of Teachers" celebrates those who dedicate their lives to shaping young minds.

For many families, a love of education is passed from one generation to the next. For others, one educator inspires a sibling, spouse or other relative to find their own place in the classroom. Each family has a story about what drew them to public education and what keeps them there.

If teaching runs in your family, we want to hear your story! Submit a photo of you and your fellow educators, including parents, siblings, grandparents or even aunts and uncles, who share this incredible calling. Let's honor the passion, dedication and impact of families who make a difference in the classroom every day. at www.nsea.org/Family.



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- ✓ On the Cover: Keeping Language Alive
- ✓ The Work Starts Now by NSEA President Tim Royers
- ✓ Election Preview: NSEA Recommended Candidates
- ✓ Info Graphic: Nebraska Rankings and Estimates
- ✓ Bargaining Watch: Protecting Members
- ✓ Reminder: Check Your Paycheck
- ✓ NSEA Updates: Departures and Retirements Lead to Changes
- ✓ NSEA-Retired Fall Conference
- ✓ Free STEM Resource Available for Teachers

NEW LOOK

Beginning with the October issue, *The Voice* will arrive 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 bring members the same great content, stories and information in every issue. The magazine may look a little different when it arrives, but inside, it's still the same *The Voice* you know.