

# THE VOICE

The Nebraska State Education Association ♦ December 2018



## Sydney Jensen

### 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year

- Robust Mentoring Key for Beginners
- Call for Topics: Delegate Assembly
- Retirement Plan in 'Good' Shape





## THE VOICE

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## A Great Public School for Every Child.

# The Code, Ethics, Dignity

## State's Code of Ethics for Educators Aligns with Principle on Human Dignity

In August, NSEA joined seven other statewide education organizations to endorse a Statement of Principle on Human Dignity. That endorsement followed a series of racially-tinged incidents in Nebraska schools during the past year.

In announcing the partnership, NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell pledged Association support for students who are bullied, harassed or intimidated.

"I am here today to pledge to our students that we have your back and will work diligently with our members to create welcoming and inclusive schools that provide every student an opportunity to reach their potential and be productive members of our community," she said.

Each organization committed to specific actions to educate and create awareness. Among NSEA's commitments: a pledge to provide members with details on the Nebraska Department of Education Standards of Conduct and Ethics.

The Standards of Professional Practices for Nebraska educators have been adopted by the Nebraska State Board of Education. The standards include three sections: A Code of Ethics; Standards for Continuance in Professional Service; and Contractual Obligations.

The Nebraska Professional Practices Commission is charged with developing the criteria for ethical and professional performance, competency and other designated areas. The Commission also manages the licensing of professional educators, and recommends admonishment, reprimand or absolving certificated education professionals when complaints of wrongdoing are filed.

The Code of Ethics developed by the Commission includes several instances of language that address fairness and equality. In fact, the opening line of the preamble of the Code of Ethics states that *"The educator shall believe in the worth and dignity of human beings."*

The preamble also states that *"the educator shall regard as essential to these goals the protection of the freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity for all."*

Also found in the Code, under the heading of "Commitment as a Professional Educator" is this language: *"The educator shall exhibit good moral character, maintain high standards of performance, and promote equality of opportunity."*

## NSEA Objectives Support Resolution

Joining seven other Nebraska school-related organizations, the NSEA Board of Directors in June OK'd seven objectives — some already underway — in support of the Statement of Principle on Human Dignity signed by those organizations. NSEA will:

- Promote the use of diverse literature in the classroom.
- Increase social justice awareness and capacity for advocacy by hosting social justice retreats for members across the state.
- Promote teaching as a career among people of color. This objective includes support for Educators Rising chapters in high schools across the state as well as support for students taking the Praxis Core Test for entrance to college of education programs.
- Provide training for teachers on how to talk about race and racism.
- Address the issue of race-based mascots and their impact on school culture.
- Form a social justice committee to coordinate activities and trainings.
- Provide members with information on the Nebraska Department of Education Standards of Conduct and Ethics.

In perhaps the strongest and most direct language, the Code states that the educator *"Shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, gender, marital status, age, national origin, ethnic background, or disability."*

Finally, as a "Commitment to the Public" the Code states that the educator *"Shall support the principle of due process and protect the political, citizenship, and natural rights of all individuals."*

Other organizations signed on include the Nebraska Council of School Administrators, the Nebraska Association of School Boards, The Nebraska Coaches Association, the Nebraska School Activities Association, the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association and the Nebraska State Athletic Administrators Association.

To learn more about the Code, go to:  
[nppc.nebraska.gov](http://nppc.nebraska.gov)

**On the Cover:** Serendipity played a role in Sydney Jensen's arrival in Nebraska. Talent played a role in her selection as Nebraska teacher of the Year. Learn more on Page 6. (Photo by Drew Worster, Nebraska Department of Education)

# Respect, Understanding & Jacob



**NSEA President  
Jenni Benson**

“

*I urge you  
to think of our  
students who  
exit the school  
doors each day  
and are likely  
to experience  
similar  
discrimination  
and prejudice  
as they go about  
the business  
of life.*

”

As I write this on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, I can see that the end of the year is but a few short weeks away.

This is the season when it is easy to turn an anticipatory eye toward the New Year. But we cannot afford to ignore the blessings and shortcomings of the past 11 months. In doing so, we see that most of us are generously blessed while realizing that there is much to be done to improve on our imperfect world.

There are two areas in which we could all elevate our efforts: respect and understanding. I'm thinking about those topics specifically in the context of race and diversity, issues that can sometimes be difficult to broach in open conversation.

NSEA's core value statement includes this statement: "We value diversity as being vital to the education process and integral in preparing students to function in a democratic society that protects human and civil rights."

## **Timeless, Timely**

I want to share with you my personal story about valuing diversity and divergent opinions.

I love traveling the state, visiting Association members in their schools and taking those opportunities to read to students. My go-to story is the Dr. Seuss classic, *The Sneetches*. The story is timeless and timely – it asks the reader not to "judge people by the way they look" and to "treat others the way you want to be treated." After the readings, I love to hear the children reflect on the lessons in *The Sneetches*.

Every time I read *The Sneetches*, I think of my very own family. Two of my four children are biracial. All seven of my grandchildren are multiracial. Sadly, our family can tell scores of stories that do not reflect the lessons that this Dr. Seuss classic urges us to practice, stories in which my children and grandchildren have not been treated with respect because of their skin color.

## **Position of Respect**

Jacob is my son. A Lincoln High grad, he is a major in the U.S. Army with nearly 12 years of service, including two tours in

Afghanistan. Today, he teaches sociology, military leadership and qualitative research methods at the United States Military Academy at West Point. He sponsors the Cadet Gospel Choir and the Diversity and Inclusion Studies Fellows. He has been awarded the Bronze Star, among other commendations.

His resume commands respect. I am proud of his service, but more so that he is a good person.

Yet as a black man, he has frequently been stopped by law enforcement while driving, usually near the Academy or an Army base. More than once he has called on his cell phone from inside his car, relating to me what is happening, allowing me to be his "witness" from afar, while I keep him calm. To say the least, those have been frightening, disturbing calls.

## **Move Them Forward**

I share this personal perspective because I now have grandchildren who must be made aware of the reaction some may have to the color of their skin. I urge you to think of our students who exit the school doors each day and are likely to experience similar discrimination and prejudice as they go about the business of life.

As I reflect on my own family, I am ever mindful of those students and families and their struggles each day, those who receive little respect or understanding. It is important as educators that we meet our students where they are and help them move forward. Further, it is part of the Standards of Professional Practice for educators adopted by the State Board of Education (See the story on page 2).

The Nebraska education family is working to establish a #bekind #bullyfree environment and mindset across the state. NSEA has joined seven other Nebraska education organizations to endorse a Statement of Principle on Human Dignity, and to take actions that will make that statement a reality.

Let us all elevate our efforts at offering respect and understanding at every opportunity. Acting together, we can each make a difference.

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# The Numbers

## Nebraskans Prefer Balanced Budget

### Tax Increases that Invest in Education Also Favored

The results of a statewide poll by the Holland Children's Institute should come as no surprise to Nebraskans, as most citizens have similar sentiments when it comes to a balanced budget and investment of tax dollars. The survey found:

■ 86 percent: Most Nebraskans agree that a balanced state budget supports and grows the middle class and workforce.

■ 58 percent: Nearly six in 10 think the state should raise more revenue by increasing taxes, rather than cutting spending to balance the budget (25 percent).

■ 75 percent prefer investment in K-12 public education over investment in tax breaks. And 80 percent prefer investment in mental health and addiction services.

■ Strong majorities of Democrats, Independents and Republicans agree that increased investment in a broad range of services is preferable to tax breaks for large businesses. Among Republicans, 61 percent favor increased state investment in early childhood childcare and education and 69 percent favor more investment in children's healthcare.

Holland officials said the poll shows that "while Nebraska voters are committed to balancing the state budget, they want to see increased state investment in vital services – even if it means increasing taxes – and they would like to raise state revenues by having big corporations and wealthy citizens pay their fair share."

Institute CEO Hadley Richters told the Lincoln Journal Star that Nebraskans clearly believe in a balanced budget.

"But I think that consensus (on balancing the state budget) will surprise a lot of people," she said, "especially in how consistent it is statewide, in urban and rural areas, and across the political spectrum."

Most Democrats (83 percent) and independents (53 percent) favored increasing taxes to balance the budget. Even a solid plurality of Republicans – 47 percent to 38 percent – favored that method.

Further, increasing taxes was supported by a majority in all three congressional districts, including the 3rd District, where 51 percent favored that approach.

# 'Good' Grades Given to State Retirement Plan

## Annual Report on Plan Highlights Growth, Stability

The outlook continues to be rosy for the state-managed retirement plan for public school employees.

In fact, "good" might be the best adjective for the plan status as of July 1, 2018. "Good" was used frequently to describe the growth during the annual report on the plan to the Public Employees Retirement Systems Board of Directors in November.

"Someone asked before the meeting started whether it would be good news," said Pat Beckham, a consultant and principal actuary with Cavanaugh Macdonald Consulting. "I would say 'yes.'"

Near the end of the report, the board's Jim Schulz went further.

"To make that much more (income) in one year, that's not good – that's 'good good,'" said Schulz.

All three plans (school, judges and state patrol) under the board's purview experienced very good growth. The school plan's market value assets grew by \$760 million, to \$11.636 billion, an 8.6 percent increase, in the year that ended on June 30. The board has set an assumed annual rate of return on investment of 7.5 percent.

"Eight-point-six percent is great – the expected is 7.5 percent," said Beckham. "The gain on assets and liabilities – it's all good."

### Well-Funded

The good news also extended to the plan's long-term health. Two years ago, the forecast projected the plan to be fully funded by 2038. A year ago, that date was 2030. The most recent projection sees a fully-funded plan by 2028.

Among other key findings, said Beckham, was that salary increases below

assumed levels for the plan created an actuarial gain on future liabilities. That gain combined with market growth to bolster the funded status – the percent of liabilities that are currently supported by cash in the system. The school plan is now 88.8 percent funded, up from 86.7 percent a year ago. Five years ago, the school plan was just 77 percent funded.

"A two percent changed in (funded) ratio is not inconsequential," she said.

### 'Healthy Improvement'

Two years ago, the PERB lowered the actuarial rate of return on investments from 8 to 7.5 percent.

Beckham said the number of public retirement plans that maintain an 8

percent or higher rate of return continues to dwindle. Fifteen years ago, most public funds assumed an 8 percent return. Over the past few years, most have scaled back to a more conservative rate of 7.5 percent or less, with only a handful above the 7.5 percent rate.

"There has been a pretty drastic change in a period of seven to nine years," she said.

The school plan's unfunded liability dropped from \$1.66 billion to \$1.46 billion.

"That's a fairly healthy improvement," said Brent Banister, also with Cavanaugh Macdonald.

Banister said the school plan is stable

enough that no additional state contribution beyond the statutory rate will be required in the next year.

In addition to the state's contribution, which equals two percent of teacher salaries, education employees contribute 9.78 percent of salary, and school districts contribute the equivalent of 9.88 percent of salary. The state plan covers all K-12 education employees in Nebraska except for those in Omaha. Educators there fall under a separate plan that was founded decades before the state plan.

## Retirement Plan Status is 'Good'

'Good' was used often to describe the status of the Nebraska teacher retirement plan. Here are facts about the plan:

### Active Participants

42,349

### Retired Beneficiaries

24,486

### Vested Inactive

6,169

### Non-vested Inactive

16,940

### Active Projected Salaries

\$2.027 Billion

### Retired Benefits

\$588.2 Million



**Excited for Teacher:** Moments after learning she was Nebraska's 2019 Teacher of the Year, Lincoln High School English teacher Sydney Jensen was greeted in an LHS hallway by enthusiastic students excited for her honor.

# Summer Serendipity

## Life-Changing Summer Camp Job Led Teacher of the Year to Nebraska

When it comes to life-changing experiences, Lincoln teacher Sydney Jensen can cite her time at summer camp as a splendid example.

A summer camp job drew Jensen to Nebraska.

Her work as a camp counselor was great training, she said, truly preparing her for classroom leadership.

That summer job also led to love, marriage and a permanent move from her home state in the Deep South to Nebraska.

"I grew up in Georgia, went to the University of Georgia, and in the summer, I would come to Nebraska to work at camp," she said. "That was just sort of serendipitous."

It was especially serendipitous for Lincoln High School, where Jensen changes lives every day as she teaches freshman English and works as an instructional coach.

To the benefit of all involved, Jensen has been named Nebraska's 2019 Teacher of the Year.

Her title is also a boost for Lincoln High's reputation of excellence. She is the fifth LHS educator in 23 years to be so honored.

Jensen's term as Teacher of the Year was convened with a luncheon at NSEA Headquarters on Nov. 1. Co-finalist Scott Wilson, a history teacher at Omaha Central High School, was recognized with an Award of Excellence. Both are NSEA members.

### Sydney Jensen

#### Teaching Roles

- Instructional Team Leader for English 9 courses at Lincoln High School.

- Instructional coach at LHS and certified trainer of trainers for Classroom that Works model.

#### Education

- Bachelor's degree in English education, University of Georgia, 2013.

- Master's degree in educational leadership in progress through Doane University.

#### Awards

- 2018 Lincoln Public Schools Inspire Educator Award for educators offering inspirational leadership.



### A Positive Culture

For Jensen it was "always in the back of my brain that I wanted to be a teacher, and English is the thing that I'm good at."

One summer during her college years, her parents gave her a choice of furthering her college coursework or taking a job. An uncle who worked at Camp Kitaki in southeast Nebraska urged her to apply.

"I absolutely loved it. I think that working at a summer camp is really great teacher training in a lot of ways, especially when it comes to relationship building and classroom management," said Jensen.



Summer camp counselors, she said, get a week to construct a positive cabin culture. Sometimes it works, sometimes it falters.

"But you get to restart the very next Sunday with a brand-new class, or cabin and kids. So, it's easy to figure out what works and what doesn't," she said.

"Outside of student teaching, working at camp was probably the biggest thing that prepared me for being in the classroom," she said.

Her student teaching experience was superb, she said, thanks to Morgan County, GA, teacher Dana Buxton.

"There are things that she taught me and modeled for me that I still use," she said. "I think that all of these things sort of created this pathway into becoming an English teacher. It's exactly what I want to be doing."

### Confidential Capacity

Jensen was surprised at her nomination, and equally surprised to be selected as a finalist, at age 28. Her Lincoln High colleague and 2017 Teacher of the Year, Amber Vlasnik, recognized Jensen's skills and submitted the nomination.

District officials, too, have noticed Jensen's talents. She's in her sixth year teaching, but administrators asked her two years ago to leave the classroom to become an instructional coach.

"I just couldn't see myself leaving the classroom completely, so I felt lucky that the district gave the OK for me to teach part-time and coach part-time," she said. Today, she teaches three periods of English and coaches other educators the rest of the day. In that role, she works with new and veteran teachers, giving support in a confidential capacity outside the appraisal process.

"It stays between us, and I think that tears away some of the vulnerability people can feel," she said. "Asking for help can sometimes be scary, but when it's pretty low risk coming to an instructional coach, I think people are more willing to do it."

### 'Open-Door' Pact

Because much of the work is done in isolation, teaching can be a lonely career, she said. In that setting, educators may be afraid to vocalize problems for fear that others may see them as ineffective. Asking for help is "one of the strongest things a person can do" and helps educators build relationships with one another.

"Building relationships with teachers in the building and asking for help is something that is important to changing the culture of teaching and making it a

## Central's Wilson also Honored

**Scott Wilson** has taught history at Omaha Central High School for the past 21 years, and was a finalist for the 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year.

He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1997 and a master's degree in historical studies from Nebraska Wesleyan University in 2013.

Wilson has created projects and traveled the world with his students in efforts to teach history.

He has led two field trips to Europe to study World War II; taken students to Alabama to study Civil Rights history; and taken an advanced placement class to Kansas to study the "Bleeding Kansas" era of U.S. history.

His students also travel to Kansas City each year to visit the World War I museum in that city.

Wilson created a project with his U.S. History students to research Central High grads who perished in 20th Centu-

ry wars, and to tell their story. Students visited with their Central High classmates, veteran's groups, family members and others as part of their research. They combed through newspaper clippings, government documents and other sources to build a biography of each person. The project took most of a decade, and the resultant books are housed at the Central High library.

He has written numerous grants to allow students who need financial assistance to take part in field trips.

Wilson gives regular tours of historic Central High School, to parent and alumni groups, new teachers and civic groups.

Wilson said teachers can introduce humor and smiles into the classroom each day.

"When students feel welcomed and appreciated and happy, that is when they are most ready to learn. Teachers then need to be ready when that window opens."



Wilson

more attractive career for people who are coming out of high school and college."

She cited as an example a first-year teacher at LHS who was trying to enhance her skills at the same time Jensen was trying to fine-tune her work. They arranged a shared "open-door, ask-me-any-question-you-want" pact.

"It made both of us a lot stronger," said Jensen. "I think that can help a lot of other new teachers who are feeling that same sort of isolation or lack of support."

### Warm Demander

Jensen characterizes her teaching style as that of a "warm demander."

She explained a warm demander as someone who is approachable, kind and communicates care for students in their classroom, while also demanding that students meet certain academic and behavior expectations. Without reservation, Jensen expects that every student can succeed.

"I think that if you asked my students, they know that I care for them and really have their interests at heart, that I make sure that I'm trying to give my very best as a teacher for them every single day," she said.

"But they would also say 'you've got to make sure that you're on it when you're in her class because there are no exceptions.'"

"I'm not willing to let anyone fall through the cracks or fall behind. So,

while I think I come across as being very kind and caring and warm, I also demand that students give their very best in class every single day. To not do so would make me complicit in any sort of failure that they might meet down the road, and I just can't live with that," she said.

### Loud and Raucous

When Commissioner of Education Matt Blomstedt, members of the State Board of Education, school administrators and others met outside Jensen's classroom door to deliver the news of her selection, they heard the raucous, high-energy sound of student voices debating and exchanging ideas.

Jensen confirms that her classes are full of energy.

"I think it's important that teachers play to their strengths and plan lessons that they're going to be excited to teach, whether that means structuring the lesson in a way that's going to be engaging for both the teacher and the student, or it's choosing text that inspires passion in the teacher," she said.

A training a few years ago on collaborative conversations and cooperative learning caused Jensen to restructure her classroom seating. The changes made it easier for students to converse – and made the room a bit noisier.

"The more students are talking about their learning the better their capacity is

to ask a question and advocate for themselves as learners,” she said. “They know more what they don’t know when they’re having to talk about it with a neighbor or within a small group. So, it’s been kind of cool just to see how much stronger the relationships among students are with this sort of system just because they’re getting more of a chance to talk to and learn from one another.”

Such conversations let Jensen cross what she calls the “biggest bridge in building positive relationships” – getting kids to feel heard and noticed.

“It does lead to more noise though. We are pretty loud in here most of the time, so I hesitate to say, ‘talk to your neighbor, but not too loud’ because really just I want them to be talking,” she said. “I don’t want to put up barriers that are going to keep kids from engaging with each other.”

### Building Relationships

Jensen takes genuine interest in the lives of her students. A first-day-of-school survey of her students is used to take roll call the rest of that first week.

“Saying things like ‘Ameer, who plays football and is hoping to make varsity this year’ and ‘Hunter, who likes to go fishing instead of hunting’ – showing them that I’ve read those things and I’m engaging with them, I think is the biggest way to communicate care and respect for your students.”

Jensen also attends when invited to softball games, one act plays and other student activities.

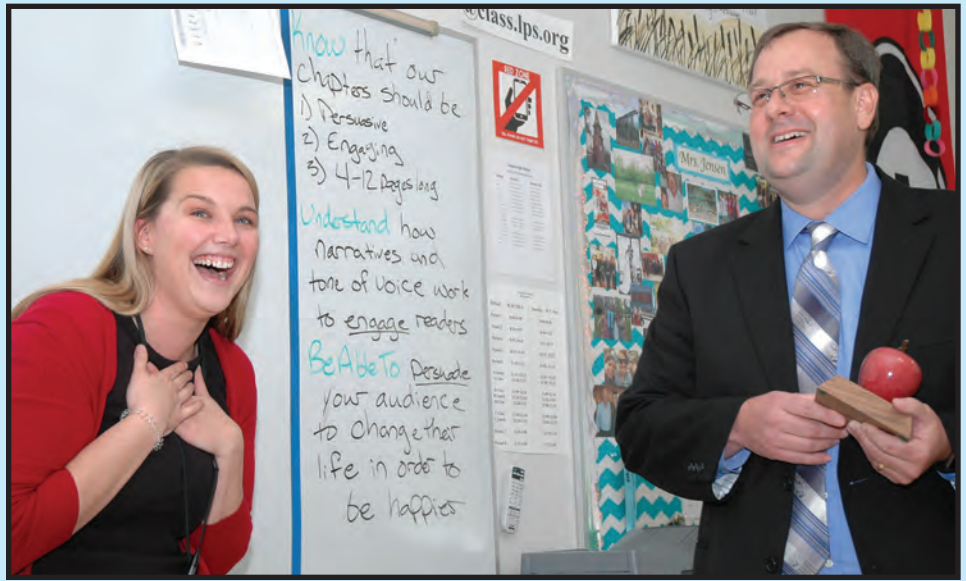
“I like to sit with their families when I go. That’s an opportunity to build those relationships with them outside of parent-teacher conferences or phone calls home, to learn about them not necessarily as an English student, but as a human being and a person,” she said.

### All Worth It

Jensen was at Lincoln High when Vlasnik was honored, so knew her experience was amazing. Jensen felt she had to honor the application process and then found it to be worthwhile.

“It was really powerful for me to be able to put into words all of my beliefs about education, about teaching and the things I’m passionate about,” she said.

She hit the “submit” button and thought to herself “Well, that was nice. No matter what happens, it was



**All Smiles!** Nebraska 2019 Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen was all smiles as Commissioner of Education Matt Blomstedt announced her selection in her Lincoln High School classroom.

## Solving a ‘Later You’ Issue

### Stalled Car Incident Turned into Metaphor on Teaching Profession

Storytelling is one of many talents held by 2019 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Sydney Jensen. At the November luncheon, the Georgia native told how the day of her interview as a finalist became a metaphor.

“I woke up early. I put on my Todd Gurley Georgia Bulldogs’ jersey for good luck and went outside and threw the Frisbee for my dog Amos Moses,” she said.

“I drove to the Department of Ed building early and parked out front, planning to sit in my car, read those letters of support and review my notes.

“At that moment the car shut off and the battery was dead. I thought to myself, ‘Jensen, this is a “later you” problem.’

“I walked into my interview, and I gave it the best I could. On my way back to my car, I remembered the problem I had left for ‘later me’ who was now ‘current me.’

“My husband was out of town for work, so a friend came and drove me home. We returned after business hours, hoping to avoid the interview panel witnessing me

pushing my car, in high heels and a dress.

“I thought to myself, as an English teacher, this is a metaphor.”

“Every day teachers problem-solve a lack of funding, large class sizes, limited space and, especially, all the needs that students have that may not be met at home: hunger, poverty, mental health — all the things we wish we could change for our students, but often can’t.

“We abandon our own struggles in pursuit of focusing on our students and we decide what has to be a ‘later problem’ and what simply can’t wait, and we find a way and we make learning possible. We help them and ourselves figure it out.

“This is this is part of why I’m so thankful to be a part of Nebraska public schools, where we do all that we can to give our students the best education we know how to give, no matter how great the obstacles.

“I’m so proud to represent Nebraska as the 2019 Teacher of the Year. Whatever value I have as a teacher and a person comes from surrounding myself with the best of humans who will challenge my thinking and help me be better tomorrow than I am today.

“Just like teaching, I know this is a journey rather than a destination, and I’m so excited to begin.”

all worth it in my book.”

She was soon an interviewee for Teacher of the Year, then a finalist, and today is Nebraska’s Teacher of the Year. That title may be current for a short time, but it will be a life-changing event.

“It’s easy to ask ‘Why was I chosen? Am I really deserving of such a great honor and experience?’ I’m trying to see

it as ‘I’m only 28 and I have a lot of years left to be able to share all the things that I’ve learned through this experience with other teachers,’” she said.

One thing she knows will not change: her profession.

“I don’t really see myself ever leaving the classroom. I think it’s kind of just what fills my bucket.”



# State Mentoring Programs are Key for Beginning Teachers

## Research Supports Results: High Quality Mentoring Improves Skills, Cuts Turnover

By Jordan Koch

In 2016–17, I embarked on my first year of teaching. I was assigned a mentor, also a teacher, who received neither leave from the classroom for one-on-one coaching, nor formal training in the role, nor a rigorous screening process.

Luckily, I was also selected into a university program that paired me with a different sort of mentor. A past educator with mentor training under her belt, she devoted five hours a week to provide me with new teaching and management strategies, helping with lesson plans, and teaching my class while I observed other master teachers, among other things. Not only did she help me grow professionally, she provided support during stressful, emotionally difficult times. My mentor made me a better teacher and servant of children.

### Feeling Isolated

Needless to say, I believe strong mentors and mentoring policies are vital for new teachers, especially because there are so many of us. In 1987–88, the typical teacher had 15 years of experience; by 2007–08 the typical teacher was in their first year, whether straight from college or after a career switch.<sup>1</sup> One-third of teachers leave the profession within the first five years.<sup>2</sup> In states without strong mentoring policies, new teachers' feelings of isolation may contribute to high turnover rates. Teachers make, on average, four instructional decisions every minute, or around 1,300 decisions per day.<sup>3</sup> Beginning teachers — those who have been in the profession for less than three years — may be overwhelmed by the demands of the classroom without proper support and guidance from experi-

enced, highly qualified teacher mentors.

### Dedicated Funding Saves Money

Here are research-based recommendations for supporting high-quality mentoring programs for beginning teachers:

- Districts need clear formal mentoring program standards to guide effective mentoring programs and to help frame the purpose for mentoring.

- State policies and district standards should allocate dedicated time for beginning teachers and their mentors to meet. According to a National Center for Education Statistics report, only 36 percent of new teachers who met with their mentors a “few times per year” reported that it improved their instruction. When mentors and mentees met weekly, that figure increased to 88 percent.<sup>4</sup>

- The selection of quality mentors may be one of the most important factors, as poorly qualified mentors are unlikely to improve a beginning teacher's skills.

- Dedicated state funding for formal mentoring is another characteristic of a strong mentoring policy. Every year, teacher turnover costs U.S. school districts an estimated \$1 to \$2.2 billion.<sup>5</sup> Out of a sample of 1,990 first-year teachers included in a National Center for Education Statistics study, 86 percent of teachers who had been assigned mentors were still teaching after five years compared with 71 percent who did not have mentors.<sup>6</sup>

- States that have mentoring policies in place should assess whether retention of new teachers has improved.

### Students Also Benefit

Strong formal mentoring policies not only help states and districts retain and develop teachers, they also help students. Students who had teachers that received three years of formal mentoring saw significant achievement gains, according to the U.S. Department of Education. The average student moved from the 50th percentile up 4 percentile points in reading and 8 points in math.<sup>7</sup>

Nebraska does not currently have a state-funded mentoring program, and this is affecting new teachers and teacher retention in the state. Many small, rural districts are unable to provide high-quality mentoring programs that match a beginning teacher with a teacher in their content area. State funds once used for Rule 26, the statutory Mentor Teacher Program, have been reallocated within the state budget, thus



**Jordan Koch**  
Papillion-LaVista  
Education  
Association

“

*Students who had teachers that received three years of formal mentoring saw significant gains, according to the U.S. Department of Education.*

”

## Nominate An Outstanding Mentor

Do you know of a current practicing Nebraska teacher who has been an outstanding mentor for you or other educators in your district? Let NSEA know!

We need your help in identifying those amazing mentors that NSEA could contact about serving as a **paid** NSEA Virtual Mentor and support the success of a new teacher. This is a great opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding mentoring you or new teachers in your district have received.

Please complete the brief form (using the link below) by Monday, Jan. 14, and Dr. Cindy Copich, NSEA's Teaching and Learning Specialist, will contact the nominated teacher to see whether they are interested in participating in a paid mentoring opportunity for NSEA members.

Nominate at this link:  
[bit.ly/nominatementor19](http://bit.ly/nominatementor19)





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- Reading Specialist (PK-12)
- Science (elementary and secondary)\*
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causing mentoring programs in many districts to be put aside.

### Reallocate Resources

NSEA received a three-year grant from the National Education Association to fund a virtual mentoring program. However, these funds cannot support or sustain an entire state-wide program. Knowing that mentoring is a research-based support for the success of new teachers, mentoring should be a state-funded initiative so that passionate young educators stay in the profession and are successful.

All new educators should be as fortunate as I am to have a strong mentor. This coming legislative session, I hope to advocate for our Nebraska legislative and state board representatives to update Rule 26 and to reallocate resources to fully fund the Nebraska Mentoring Program. Please join me and NSEA in this effort to advocate for the success and retention of new teachers in our state. Join the NSEA cyberlobbying team and sign up for the NSEA Legislative Updates by contacting NSEA's Cathy Schapmann at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

[cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org)

If you'd like more information regarding the NSEA mentoring program, please contact Dr. Cindy Copich, Teaching and Learning Specialist at 402-875-2123, or:

[cindy.copich@nsea.org](mailto:cindy.copich@nsea.org)

*This article was revised from State Mentoring Policies Key to Supporting Novice Teachers published as a National Association of State Boards of Education policy update in June 2018.*

*Jordan Koch is a 6th grade teacher at Bell Elementary in the Papillion-LaVista Public School District. She is a member of New Generation of Educators in Nebraska (NGEN) an NSEA-sponsored group to support the success of new teachers. NGEN believes in the power of uniting and supporting early career educators in their first seven years of teaching through Association membership and engagement.*

### NOTES

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5. Richard Ingersoll, University of Pennsylvania, analysis of data from the 2007-08 Schools Statistics and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplement, the 2008-09 Teacher Follow-up Survey (TFS), cited in Alliance for Excellent Education, "On the Path to Equity: Improving the Effectiveness of Beginning Teachers" (Washington, DC, July 2014).
6. Lucinda Gray and Soheyla Taie, "Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results from the First through Fifth Waves of the 2007-08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study," NCES 2015-337 (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).
7. Glazerman et al., "Comprehensive Teacher Induction."



### An 80-Book Parade!

A warm and sunny picture is the perfect salve for a cold, enduring fall, and members of the Hayes Center Education Association have just the photograph! HCEA President Cheyenne Jeffers reports that her membership distributes books to every child along the Homecoming parade route, averaging about 80 books each year. Shown above, HCEA Treasurer Leah Anderjaska, left, and member Rhea Softley distribute books at the 2018 parade. Jeffers also notes that the Association donates and serves a fundraising meal at the local senior center every January, gives a local scholarship each May, and hosts a pie baking contest at the county fair.

## NSEA Resources Help Improve Your Local's Contract Language

Bargaining teams across the state, from small PK-12 local associations to statewide Higher Education teams, have begun bargaining sessions for their 2019-20 negotiated agreements.

When bargaining begins, there are invariably questions that arise about drafting new or improving existing language.

The NSEA Microsearch database is always a good place to start when seeking examples of language from current or past Nebraska negotiated agreements. The password-secured site offers access to entire contracts or allows word- and phrase-specific searches, letting teams quickly review common wording. Searches can also be set to limited geographic areas.

If negotiators are looking for a starting point, any of NSEA's 16 Organizational Specialists can share a sample negotiated agreement that will include many of the most basic sections found in negotiated agreements. Those contracts will include language ranging from salary advancement and leave language to insurance benefits and association rights.

If your team needs access to the Microsearch site, follow the directions on the login screen at this website:

[nsea.org/collective-bargaining](https://nsea.org/collective-bargaining)

For details, or if you have other contract questions, contact the NSEA Organizational Specialist assigned to your local at 1-800-742-0047.

## Wanted: History Award Nominees

The history of Nebraska belongs to all Nebraskans. Now, History Nebraska will honor those that help preserve, share and teach the unique history of our state.

The 2018 History Nebraska Awards will be awarded on Monday, March 4, at the History Nebraska Legislative Reception at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln. One of those awards – the History Nebraska's Excellence in Teaching Award – will go to a teacher of Nebraska history. The award goes to a teacher who excels in teaching Nebraska history through creativity and imagination in the classroom by using documents, artifacts, historic sites, oral histories, and other primary sources.

Also to be awarded are the Champion of History Award and the History Nebraska Advocacy Award.

Nominations are due by Jan. 18. Winners will be notified by January 30th, 2019. For details, call 402-471-3272. To nominate someone, go to:

[history.nebraska.gov/awards](https://history.nebraska.gov/awards)



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# Professional Development Set at '19 DA

## After Success in 2018, PD is Back for Encore

In April, NSEA leadership tried something new at the Association's annual Delegate Assembly, offering 30 professional breakouts to delegates and anyone else who was interested in attending.

The reaction was overwhelming. Eighty percent of nearly 300 delegates rated the breakouts as the highlight of the Assembly. Consider these evaluation comments from delegates:

■ *"This was a very good learning experience and makes me very excited to be a teacher who has people that support each other."*

■ *"I loved the professional development. How can we get ALL teachers trained on trauma sensitive classrooms? We need it!"*

There is good news: the 2019 Delegate Assembly will again offer professional development on Friday night, April 26, following the formal Assembly call to order and address by the keynote speaker. Most other Association business will occur on Saturday, April 27.

"This model was a definite success, and members want to see it happen again," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "Planning is well under way and we will have timely and valuable professional development on the schedule once again."

The professional development will be open to registered delegates and non-delegates alike. Members are urged to submit ideas for sessions at:

[bit.ly/2019dapd](http://bit.ly/2019dapd)

"We want these opportunities to be available to all educators, elected delegates, members and even non-members," said NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell. "We are working to continue to expand professional development offerings. This is part of that plan."

On Saturday, delegates will discuss and debate changes to By-laws, any proposed new Resolutions or New Business Items. Dues for 2019-20 will also be set by Delegates on Saturday.

## Professional Development at Delegate Assembly

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

## Recognize a Co-Worker's Good Work

Spring weather is not so far away — and neither is NSEA's annual Delegate Assembly. That means now is a good time to give serious consideration to who you or your association might nominate for one of the honors to be awarded at that meeting in April.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 15, 2019, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA. Online nomination forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

[www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)

The 2019 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel April 26-27. NSEA members are eligible for:

■ **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2017-18 school year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Also to be presented:

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

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

The 2019 Delegate Assembly is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, April 26-27 at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building representative, or your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047. All delegates must be elected at the local or cluster level (see page 16 for details on the cluster delegate process).

# Children's Fund: To Help Your Students



For nearly a quarter century, the NSEA Children's Fund has made a wonderful difference for children in poverty or for children facing devastating loss.

When an NSEA member sees a child in need of a warm coat, eyeglasses or other basic necessities, all they need do is call NSEA and ask for the Children's Fund.

Since 1994, donations to the Children's Fund have provided such assistance, with thousands of dollars sent to help children in need. In the last two years, the Fund has provided nearly \$100,000 in relief.

On the other side of the ledger, local associations are encouraged to brainstorm fundraising ideas: collect change; host a jeans day fundraiser; or consider other ideas to raise funds on behalf of the Children's Fund. The Children's Fund is financed entirely through donations; NSEA picks up all administrative expenses and costs.

To make donations easier, the Fund now accepts gifts through PayPal. Find the link at:

[nsea.org/childrensfund](http://nsea.org/childrensfund)

For details, call Sally Bodtke at NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

[sally.bodtke@nsea.org](mailto:sally.bodtke@nsea.org)



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Now is a great time to get good deals on end-of-model-year cars.

If you're in the market, the NEA Auto Buying Program through TrueCar is the first place to look! NEA members and their families enjoy preferred pricing, save an average of \$3,383 off MSRP on new cars, plus get these benefits:

- **Used Car Discounts:** Save hundreds off the list price.
- **See What Others Paid:** See what others have paid for the same car so you know when you're getting a good or a great price.
- **Upfront Pricing:** See pricing, price rankings, and lock in Guaranteed Savings on the car you want before you leave home.

Visit the NEA Auto Buying Program today to see how much you can save! Go to

[neamb.com/buyacar](http://neamb.com/buyacar)

### Kids' Magazines Make Great Gifts!

Delight the kids and grandkids in your life with an entertaining, educational holiday gift. Choose from dozens of titles suitable for all age groups including preschoolers, children, teens and 'tweens' at up to 85 percent off newsstand prices. To view the list of titles and to place your order, visit:

[www.neamag.com](http://www.neamag.com)

### Disaster Relief Fund Aids Wildfire Victims

NEA Member Benefits announces that the California Teachers Association (CTA) has established a disaster relief fund to allow educators and others across the nation to contribute to and support recovery efforts.

Wildfires in that state have killed dozens, burned hundreds of homes, businesses and schools.

Donations may be made to the CTA Disaster Relief Fund by sending a check made payable to the fund to:

**CTA Disaster Relief Fund  
1705 Murchison Drive  
Burlingame, CA 94010**

For more details about the fund, go to the website at:

[www.CTAMemberBenefits.org/drff](http://www.CTAMemberBenefits.org/drff)

# Stop! Collaborate!

## Listen to the Benefits of Working with Colleagues

By Sabrina Gates

When thinking of a traditional classroom, you probably envision one teacher working alone with a group of students. While educators often work alone in the classroom, they do not—and should not—operate independently. Throughout my career, I've always found that the best way to improve an educational experience is to work together.

Here are some of the advantages of a collaborative educational environment—not only for your students, but for yourself:

#### Collaboration Helps Creativity

It may seem like a no brainer, but a true brainstorm is not possible without collaboration. Collaboration provides a safety net; it helps you catapult your thinking and develop ideas that may seem crazy at first.

Working with a small group of trusted teachers gave me the opportunity to turn what I thought was a silly idea at the time into a unique and creative lesson plan. When it was time for my class to study Elizabethan England, I had the idea to have my students rewrite Shakespeare into different time periods that we had already studied. I was hesitant to bring this idea to a large group – it seemed so out there! But after developing the idea with my peers, I had a new and creative lesson plan that my students would love. Peer-to-peer collaboration can turn a small idea into the seeds for something fabulous.

#### Collaboration Teaches You About You

The process of becoming a National Board

Certified Teacher was the most important of my career. The experience — particularly working with other professionals — made me turn inside-out and think about things from a new perspective. Learning and working with others made me dig deeper and explore who I was as a learner and a teacher. Equally important, it made me explore who my kids could be as learners.

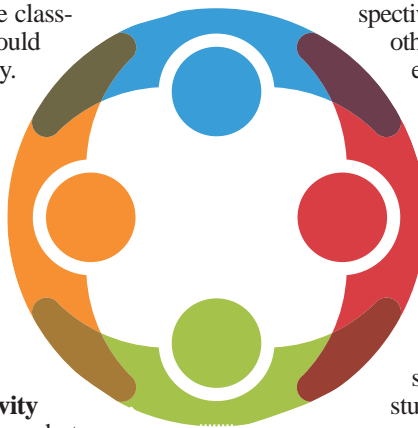
In our educational culture today, it's extremely important to join professional learning communities and pursue professional learning opportunities to ensure ongoing growth for our students and for ourselves.

#### Collaborative Learning Helps Students

The collaboration shouldn't end among the teachers — it should be used during the school day among students, as well! Plan activities that give students the opportunity to work and collaborate together to learn and grow from each other.

Collaborative learning has been shown to not only develop higher-level thinking skills in students, but boost their confidence and self-esteem as well. Group projects can maximize educational experience by demonstrating the material, while improving social and interpersonal skills. Students learn how to work with various types of learners and develop their leadership skills.

When we work together, we create a better learning experience. Teacher collaboration positively impacts student achievement, and allows us as educators to explore new territory.



## Protect Your Online Purchases Use Lockers, Ship-to-Store

By Rivan V. Stinson, Reporter

Packages are stolen from porches and doorways year-round, but thieves are particularly busy during the holiday season, when there are more items to steal. Take the following steps to protect your purchases:

**Ship to a store.** Some retailers let you send online purchases to one of their stores for pick-up. The service is usually free.

**Send to a locker.** UPS, FedEx and Amazon all operate locations where packages can be delivered. Amazon provides lockers in Whole Foods Markets and convenience stores. When you place your order, search for your nearest locker, add it to your address book and select

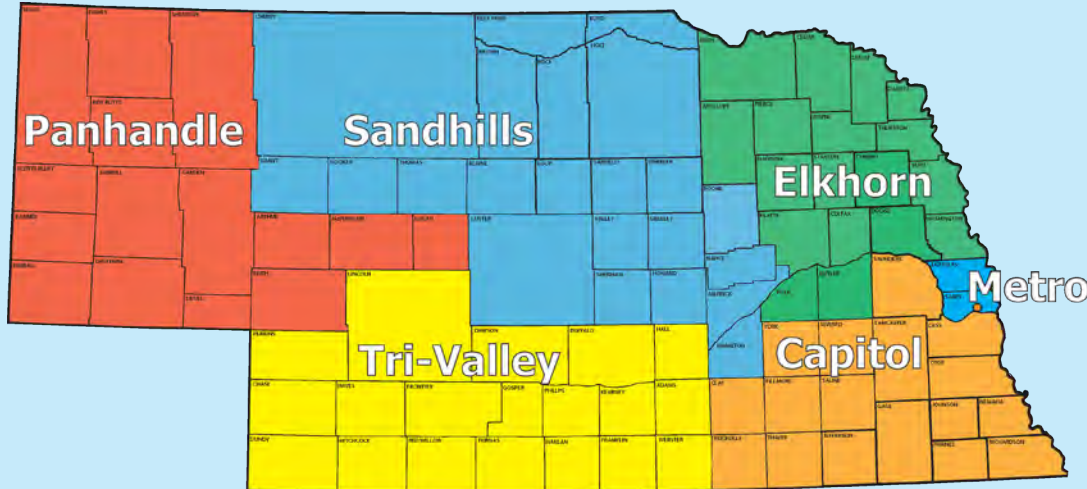
it for deliveries.

For items shipped via UPS or FedEx, you'll need to register for a free UPS MyChoice or FedEx Delivery Manager account. You can ask to have your purchases delivered to one of their participating retailers. UPS doesn't charge for the service, but FedEx may charge up to \$15 to deliver to a different address.

If a package is declared lost or undelivered by any carrier, your best bet is to contact both the carrier and the merchant to figure out who's responsible for your refund. Some merchants may refund your purchase.

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# Consider Leadership!

Professional development, networking, travel: those are attractive enticements for most jobs.

If those benefits are of interest to you, consider the personal growth brought about by leadership in your professional organization.

The window for filing for the nearly three dozen elected positions on NSEA district boards and the NSEA Board of Directors will open on Tuesday, Jan. 1, and will close on Sunday, Jan. 27.

Election of members as at-large delegates to NEA Representative Assembly will occur on the same timeline. Watch the January edition of *The Voice* for details on that filing process.

NSEA members will vote beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 15. Voting will close at midnight on Saturday, March 2.

To file, go to the NSEA website and click on '2019 District Elections.' Select your district, and choose the office you seek. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. Your number will be found above your name on the mailing label of *The*

*Voice*, or on the email that delivers the digital editions of *The Voice*. Call NSEA if you have questions: 1-800-742-0047.

The filing process allows candidates to post a 50-word statement, which voters can read during balloting. Type the statement in a Word or other text document and then paste the statement into the appropriate box during the filing process.

Note that NSEA encourages minorities to seek Association office at all levels. NSEA's Minority Involvement Plan plan says "It shall be the goal of the Association to seek minority representation on governing and appointive bodies at least equal to the percentage of minority membership for that appropriate level."

If you do not have Internet access, mail your name, address, local association name and a 50-word statement to: NSEA Elections, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Be sure to state which office you are seeking.

In all cases, the deadline for filing for office is Sunday, Jan. 27. NSEA's website is at:

[www.nsea.org](http://www.nsea.org)

## Higher Ed Academy Seeks Leaders

There will be vacancies to fill on the NSEA Higher Ed Academy Board of Directors for the 2019-20 year.



Vacancies exist for three-year terms of president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, higher education faculty representative, academic professional representative, and educational support professional representative.

Because Higher Ed members are now inte-

grated into NSEA's six districts, depending on work-place, they will receive two e-mails — one alerting them to NSEA elections and one for Higher Ed Academy elections.

Those interested in one of these positions must contact NSEA President Jenni Benson by Jan. 27. She can be reached at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

[jenni.benson@nsea.org](mailto:jenni.benson@nsea.org)

## Required to Vote: A Valid Email Address

NSEA members are urged to set a good example at every turn, and that includes at the voting booth. Members can elect the next round of NSEA leaders by casting a ballot in the Association elections.

Voting opens at 12:01 a.m. Friday, Feb. 15. Prior to that date, members with valid

email addresses on file will receive an e-mail detailing the process.

NSEA members without a valid e-mail address on file will receive a postcard explaining the voting. If you do not receive a postcard or an email from NSEA by Friday, Feb. 15, call 1-800-742-0047.

Update your e-mail address with NSEA at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

[www.nsea.org/contact-us](http://www.nsea.org/contact-us)



## THE VACANCIES

A statewide (see map) look at NSEA leadership opportunities for the 2019-20 school year:

### TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT

- Three seats on the District Executive Committee (one each from the East, Central and West subdistricts).
- One seat on the NSEA Board of Directors.

### ELKHORN DISTRICT

- President
- Vice President
- Four seats on the district executive committee.
- One seat on the NSEA Board of Directors.

### CAPITOL DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Two seats on the NSEA Board of Directors.

### METRO DISTRICT

- President
- Three seats on the district executive committee (subdistrict seats 2, 5 and 8).
- Two seats on the NSEA Board of Directors.

### PANHANDLE DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Three seats on the district executive committee (Area 1, Area 4 and At-Large).
- One seat on the NSEA Board of Directors.

### SANDHILLS DISTRICT

- President
- Vice President
- One seat on the District Executive Committee.



# All I want for Christmas is...



**Executive  
Director  
Maddie Fennell**

“

**Our Nebraska  
students  
both need and  
deserve expert  
educators.  
We simply  
won't have them  
if we don't  
become very  
intentional about  
understanding  
why teachers  
are leaving the  
profession and  
how we can  
keep them.**

”

I'm one of those moms who starts buying Christmas presents in May and then stores them away – hoping in December I will remember both that I have them and where I put them!

As I was sitting down to make this year's list for my family (which expanded over Thanksgiving to include a new daughter-in-law!) I decided that I would make a wish list for teachers. The list quickly became longer than we have space for here, so these are the Top Five that I wish for:

## **A Focus on Teacher Retention**

Don't get me wrong. Recruitment – especially of teachers of color – is crucial. Our teacher population needs to more closely resemble our student population for a myriad of reasons.

But we can't ignore that it takes, on average, 10 years in a profession for someone to become an expert. Our Nebraska students both need and deserve expert educators. We simply won't have them if we don't become very intentional about understanding WHY teachers are leaving the profession and how we can keep them.

And here's a clue: teacher loss is not generally the fault of students.

## **Every School to Have an Excellent Principal Who Believes in Distributed Leadership**

When Lisa Utterback became principal at Omaha's Miller Park Elementary where I taught, she took over a school that was seriously struggling. Great teachers were demoralized, test scores were down and teachers were exhausted.

She did two things right off the bat that began to change the culture. She first admitted what she WASN'T good at, then she looked to her teachers and asked for help. Building on her softball background, she instituted a team culture organized around everyone's strengths. She confessed that she was not good at scheduling and asked two teachers to take on the task. They found an additional 40 minutes of collaboration time (above their plan time) that teachers were able to use to learn from one another. Teachers took responsibility for not only the learning of their students, but of their colleagues.

Juxtapose that with a principal who *actually* said to a staff member after an active shooter drill “Well, I'm just going to admit that if there were a real shooter in our building, I hope that you get hit first!”

Strong principals like Lisa rely on their teachers for support and work with them to build a school all students need and deserve.

Weak principals fear strong teachers and create hostile environments for kids and teachers.

## **A Truly Nonpartisan Legislature**

As a fourth-grade teacher, I taught Nebraska history. I loved bringing students on their Lincoln

field trip – yelling “GO BIG RED!” at Memorial Stadium, exploring Morrill Hall, and touring the Nebraska Capitol. I was proud to talk about our unique Unicameral system and what “nonpartisan” meant.

But in 2017, a group of 27 senators (many newly elected) rebuked that proud history and determined committee leadership based on party, including the election of three freshman senators as committee chairs. The legislature then worked under temporary rules for the first 50 days of the 90-day session, due to the inability of senators to reach a consensus on their own rules.

That partisanship is not what George Norris championed in the 1930's and does not serve the best interest of Nebraskans today.

## **Political Leadership for Real Tax Reform**

Funding our public schools is the responsibility of state and local government. Local government has property taxes as a primary revenue stream, while state government relies on sales and income tax dollars. We rank 48th in state funding of schools. Meanwhile, teachers are not overpaid (many are struggling with second and third jobs) and Nebraskans want property tax relief. These are facts that reasonable people will agree upon.

Such enormous problems require strong, visionary leaders able to bridge divides and bring people together. Instead, our governor goes so far as to oust political allies who fail to give 100 percent allegiance.

We have many good people – in both parties – serving in our legislature. It is left to legislative leaders to rise to the top and encourage bipartisan legislation that will provide property tax relief without weakening our strong public schools.

## **Mental Health Resources for Our Students and Families**

Education professionals have long recognized the effect a student's mental health has on learning and achievement. Increasingly, school systems are joining forces with community health, mental health, and social service agencies to promote student well-being and to prevent and treat mental health disorders.

The Nebraska Department of Education just received a \$9 million federal grant for pilot programs to help schools intervene before behavioral problems develop into mental illness. Schools in Chadron, Hastings and South Sioux City will benefit from the five-year pilot. My wish is that we find a way to quickly take what those schools learn and expand it to other schools.

I hope that your winter break is a joyous time with loved ones and that you have an opportunity to rest, recharge and reflect on the great work you did in 2018. Happy Holidays!

# Opportunities to Serve are Numerous

## Capitol District Adds Seat to NSEA-Retired Board

Is the time right for you to serve?

If so, there are numerous opportunities to assume a leadership role in NSEA-Retired.

Filing details will be available by Monday, Jan. 7. The filing deadline is a month later, on Friday, Feb. 8. Learn more at:

[nsea.org/retired](http://nsea.org/retired)

Open positions on the Retired Board of Directors for three-year terms are treasurer, secretary, and one board member each from the Metro, Panhandle and Tri-Valley districts.

An additional board member from Capitol District (now allowing two members from Capitol, equal to Metro's total of two board members) will be added this year. The first term for this Capitol District seat will be two years, followed by three-year terms thereafter.

Candidates elected to these positions will take office on Aug. 15, 2019.

Projected numbers for Delegate Assembly representation by NSEA-Retired members appears to be at four delegates from Capitol District; five from Metro District; three each from Tri-Valley and Elkhorn Districts; and one each from Panhandle and Sandhills Districts. Two more delegates will be elected on an at-large basis.

The NSEA-Retired delegation to the NEA Representative Assembly will include two from the Metro and Capitol districts combined; two delegates from the remaining four districts and from out-of-state members; and one at large representative.

Complete details on how to file for these elections will be posted in January on the NSEA-Retired website.

### Lobby Day Scheduled

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, Feb. 12, at NSEA Headquarters.

The annual NSEA-Retired Lobby Day event is an opportunity to get an update on the Nebraska Legislature; to visit with state senators; and to enjoy lunch, conversation and a luncheon speaker.

Deadline to register is Thursday, Feb. 7. To register, go to:

[www.nsea.org/retired](http://www.nsea.org/retired)

### Thank You, Rebecca

Rebecca Smith, NSEA Associate



**In the Thick of It:** At the April 1992 NSEA Delegate Assembly, just-elected NSEA President Craig R. Christiansen, right, is congratulated by Jess Wolf as Nebraska NEA Director John Jensen, center, looks on. Jensen died in Omaha on Oct. 18.

## Jensen Recalled as 'True Warrior'

John Jensen, who devoted his entire life to education, passed away on Oct. 18, 2018.

While active in Association work during his 36-years with the Omaha Public Schools, he was perhaps even more active in causes for retired teachers.

He began his career teaching math and physics at Omaha Benson High School. He finished at Omaha South High as curriculum specialist for mathematics, science and technology as well as a coach for students on independent research.

He served on the Omaha Education Association Board of Directors and was OEA president in 1982-83. He also served on the boards of both the NSEA and the NEA.

Jensen had a deep interest in the economic well-being of educators and served on the OEA negotiation team for years. He became a trustee for the Omaha

School Employees' Retirement System (OSERS) in 1979 and was vice president for 18 years. He became involved in the National Council on Teacher Retirement (NCTR), a group serving 68 state, local and territorial pension plans. He was elected to the NCTR Executive Committee and served as president in 2001-02.

Jensen served on the OEA-Retired Board of Directors and was president from 2007-13. He was Metro District Director to the board for NSEA-Retired and served as vice president from 2011-18. He was also regional vice president of the Alliance for Retired Americans.

Tributes came from high places.

"We all love John so much. A true warrior has passed. John will be missed," said NEA President Lily Eskelsen Garcia.

Memorials are suggested to the OEA Foundation, 4202 S. 57th Street, Omaha, NE 68117.

Staff, was presented with a thank-you gift and many verbal thanks for her 10 years of working with NSEA-Retired.

Over those years, she was key in arranging meals, speakers, locations, prizes, and board meetings. You will still see her at NSEA and possibly at some of our retired events. Be sure to pass on your thanks as we did at this past fall conference.

### Mark Your Calendar for April 25

Yes, it's December, but we're already busy planning for spring!

The NSEA-Retired Spring Conference will be Thursday, April 25, at Mahoney State Park, west of Omaha.

Tentative topics include "Why Aging Brains Stay Happy" and NSEA Associate Executive Director Neal Clayburn discussing the history of Scouting in "Scout Me In."

Mini breakouts will include Tai Chi, benefits of NEA Member Benefits, and the power of storytelling. Watch *The Voice* for details.

— De Tonack, President  
NSEA-Retired



# UNL Seeks K-12 Nominees for McAuliffe Award

Christa McAuliffe sought to remind the entire nation of the importance of education and take students all over the country on the “ultimate field trip.”

McAuliffe and six others died in the 1986 explosion of the Challenger Space Shuttle.

Her courage was evident in her willingness to board the shuttle and in her fierce defense of what and how she would teach from space — the flight was to be more than a publicity stunt.

## Nominate a Colleague

To nominate a colleague for the Nebraska McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education, go to the website at:

<http://courage.unl.edu>

Nominations are due by Friday, Jan. 25. Supporting materials must be submitted electronically by Friday, March 22.

To honor her courage and her memory, the Nebraska McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence in Education was established. The annual prize honors a courageous Nebraska K-12 teacher each year with a \$1,000 prize.

The recipient's school also receives \$500 to support the school's mission.

The McAuliffe Prize teacher will be announced in May.

## Ainslie Earns NEA Honor

Lincoln Educator Feted by NSEA in '17

Doreen Sweet-Ainslie, a seventh grade social studies educator at Robin Mickel



**Ainslie**

Middle School in Lincoln is one of 46 public school educators who will receive the California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence at the NEA Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala in February.

The awardees are nominated by their peers for dedication to the profession, community engagement, professional development, attention to diversity and advocacy.

Ainslie received NSEA's Teaching Excellence Award in 2017.

The Salute to Excellence in Education Gala draws almost 1,000 supporters of public education to applaud the recipients. At the gala, the educators are truly the stars, celebrated throughout the night with music, performances, videos, and more.

Five finalists will receive \$10,000 at the gala. The nation's top educator will be revealed at the gala in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 8, and will receive an additional \$25,000. The gala will be livestreamed at:

[neafoundation.org](http://neafoundation.org).

The NEA Foundation is a public charity founded by educators for educators to improve public education for all students.

## Absentee Interventions Work for the Chronically Absent

### Statewide Nebraska Study Identifies Common Definition

Students who are chronically absent from school often perform poorly academically. They are also more likely to be delinquent, drop out or engage in other high-risk behaviors.

New research, however, identified a common way to define absenteeism and classified youth's absenteeism based on degree. The study found that interventions for youth with the highest rates of absenteeism were more successful than those for youth with fewer absences.

Conducted by researchers at the University of Nebraska, the study appears in Justice Evaluation Journal, a publication of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences.

“It's been difficult to evaluate programs that aim to reduce absenteeism since there are so many differences in how absenteeism is measured,” said Anne Hobbs, director of the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and the study's lead author. “We identified a common way to define absenteeism across programs and then evaluated programs that address a range of absence levels. This can help us determine when to intervene, how to respond, and to whom interventions should be directed.”

### Statewide Review

As part of a statewide review in Nebraska to assess the effectiveness of programs in reducing absenteeism, the study looked at 12 programs in 137 schools and involved 1,606 children and adolescents. Youth in the study ranged from ages 5 to

18 and were from a range of ethnicities, though the majority were white.

Researchers defined absenteeism as all types of absences (not just truancy), categorized it into eight types, and classified absences as both excused and unexcused. They established a common measurement and common definitions for each type of absence. They also created a common data system that each program could access, mapped attendance codes to each category of absence, and provided programs with technical assistance on using the system.

Youth were grouped into tiers based on their absentee rates: Youth in Tier 1A missed less than 5 percent of required school; in Tier 1B missed 6-10 percent; in Tier 2 missed 11-19 percent; and in Tier 3 missed 20 percent or more. With the data gathered, the study evaluated programs that served a range of youth spanning early intervention to those involved with the courts. It also examined whether classifying youth (by tier) explained improvements in attendance, taking into account age, race, gender, school, and program.

### Absenteeism Reduced

For youth who took part in programs to reduce absenteeism, the study found that youth with the highest rates of absenteeism — excused and unexcused — had the most improvements in reducing absenteeism, while youth with fewer absences did not improve significantly. The school the youth attended also played a role, though it wasn't clear what school characteristic — size, way of handling absences, or climate — had the most impact.

The study was funded by the Nebraska Crime Commission.

# Cal Casualty Lounge Remake Offer Returns

## Renew Your Lounge!

By popular demand, California Casualty's \$7,500 School Lounge Makeover is back!

While educators give so much to their students and communities, all too often, the school lounge is one of the most neglected areas of a school.

Serving educators since 1951, California Casualty knows the importance of a designated, uplifting space where school staff can relax, recharge and collaborate with colleagues. California Casualty's School Lounge Makeover will create a restful environment that nurtures creativity and provides a place for staff to catch their breath.

The 2015 recipient, Stephanie L. from Santan Elementary School in Arizona, was thrilled.

"This is almost like a spa," she said of her school's lounge. "The stress melts away as you walk through the door, it's that delightful. I am so blown away!"

Educators can transform their school lounge by simply entering for a \$7,500 School Lounge Makeover at:

[www.YourSchoolLounge.com/NEA](http://www.YourSchoolLounge.com/NEA)

All staff members at a school can enter to increase their school's chances. The deadline to enter is July 12, 2019. A winner will be announced later that month.

## Athletics Grant Set by Cal Cas Up to \$3,000 Available

California Casualty is looking to help Nebraska public school sports programs in need, with the 2019 Thomas R. Brown Athletics Grant program.

Under the provisions of the grant, middle or high school teams can receive from \$1,000 to \$3,000 for their programs. Last year, teams at Omaha Central High School and Hampton High School received grants. They were among 79 public middle schools and high schools in 33 states that benefitted from \$83,000 awarded.

The grant is named for the company's Chairman Emeritus Tom Brown, an avid sportsman who believes that teamwork, confidence and sportsmanship help develop high achievers in academics and in life.

Applications are being taken at:

[www.calcasathleticsgrant.com](http://www.calcasathleticsgrant.com)

The deadline for application is Jan. 15, 2019, with recipients announced in April.

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

## Behavior Contracts

From Kristen Sayle, a second-grade teacher in Ohio:

"One of my discipline tools is a daily behavior contract for a few students who need a daily review of behavior. I designed a chart using Microsoft Word that breaks down the day into halves or thirds, depending on the student's behavioral needs. I created the chart on 1/4 of a sheet of paper so that four fit on one 8 1/2 x 11 sheet. I cut the charts, punch them in the corner, and then put them on a ring. I keep them in a basket on my desk.

"At the end of the day, I call each child with a contract to my desk. We review their behavior and if they made good choices for each part of the day, I place a small sticker in the box according to the time of day that they made good choices. If they made a bad choice, we discuss it and I write a quick recap in the box about their behavior choices.

"The contracts are sent home each day for parents to review. It is quick and efficient. Students enjoy seeing the stickers. The teacher, students and parents get daily feedback. Some parents support the contract at home by granting privileges or taking them away according to the number of stickers they earn each day.

Sign up for Works4Me messages at: [nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html](http://nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html)



**Go Huskers — and NSEA!** Enjoying the second NSEA tailgate before the University of Nebraska vs. Minnesota football game were Arcadia Education Association's Dee Ann Roy, left, and Crete Education Association's Jenine Owens, right. Their appearance at NSEA must have been good luck as the Huskers won their first game of the season against the Golden Gophers.