

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • December 2020

PAUL TIMM

Meet Nebraska's 50th
Teacher of the Year



NPERS:

*State Retirement Plan
Remains Strong*

SURVEY SAYS:

*COVID has Educators
'Overwhelmed'*



THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
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Delegate Assembly Approaches

Annual Gathering Scheduled April 23-24

Thanksgiving has come and gone and the holidays are close at hand. That can mean only one thing: NSEA's Delegate Assembly will be here before you know it!

NSEA's annual business meeting — the 160th in Association history — will be held April 23-24 (a decision whether it will be held in person or in remote fashion, due to the pandemic, is expected to be made later this month).

Duly elected members from across the state, from local associations large and small, will tend to the business of the Association, elect leaders and chart the path for the Association for another year.

Inspiring speakers, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are part of Assembly action. Members will also elect a member to serve as the Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee representative on NSEA's Board of Directors.

NSEA first met as the Nebraska State Teachers Association in Brownville on

What is Delegate Assembly?

Nearly every year since NSEA's 1867 founding — and sometimes twice a year — Association members have met at Delegate Assembly to conduct the Association's business.

The April 2021 event will mark the 160th in NSEA's long history. But even with that rich and deep history, too few members understand it's purpose.

Now, members will be able to learn answers to the question 'What is Delegate Assembly?' by tuning in to a webinar on Tuesday, Dec. 8, at 7:30 p.m., CDT.

Members of the NSEA leadership team, including President Jenni Benson, will explain Delegate Assembly's role in driving the focus of the association and how members can become an elected delegate.

To register, go to nsea.org and click on the 'Webinars and Professional Development' link, and then on the '2020-21 New Educator Online Learning Opportunities' link.

Oct. 16, 1867, just months after Nebraska gained statehood. NSEA is the state's oldest professional association and has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year, and in some cases, twice in a year.

To make your interest in serving as an elected delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty representative, or your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

Honor a Colleague at Delegate Assembly 2021

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or group for recognition at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April 2021. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 12, 2021, and sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742.

Nominations may also be submitted online, with supporting material sent to NSEA. Online forms are under the 'Call for Nominations' link at: nsea.org/delegateassembly

Members are eligible for these awards, which carry a \$250 cash award:

- **Early Career Educator of the Year:** For a teacher in their first 5 years of teaching.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher for long-term excellence.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in their profession.

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 internal communication.

Also to be presented:

- **Friend of Education:** Honors an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education.
- **Media:** Cites a newspaper, television or radio outlet for coverage/promotion of public education.

On the Cover: Lyons-Decatur Northeast science teacher Paul Timm is Nebraska's 2021 Teacher of the Year. Learn more beginning on Page 7. (Photo by Drew Worster, Multimedia Specialist, Nebraska Department of Education)

Layer by Layer, Step by Step



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

First, we want to thank everyone who completed the recent NSEA survey on teaching during the pandemic. You can read in detail about the survey on pages 11-15, and you can review both the statewide and individual field unit results at nsea.org/survey.

The survey was sent to all active members using the email address we have on file. We also asked local presidents to remind members to complete the survey. And we posted on social media, urging members to contact us if they did not receive the survey.

The response was terrific! More than 6,500 members — one in three active members — responded. More than 2,200 added comments and every one of those comments were read and reviewed by NSEA staff and leadership.

As might be expected, the opinions of our members cover the spectrum, from “NSEA needs to stay out of this!” to “Please help us, I’m so scared!” — and those two comments came from educators in the same school district! There are many layers to this issue, and many steps to be taken to get back to normal.

Advocate for Safety

NSEA, however, cannot step back and “stay out of this.” Our Association’s Core Values, adopted by members at Delegate Assembly, provide very clear direction: We must advocate for the safety and education of our students. In part, those Core Values say:

- We value equal access to a quality education that is adequately and equitably funded.
- 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.
- We value being accurately informed activists contributing to the ever-changing system of public education.
- We value partnerships that foster excellence, nurture a desire for lifelong learning, and create responsible, productive citizens.
- We value the expertise of education professionals and recognize that fair compensation and respect are vital for a quality public education.

Swiss Cheese Measures

As this school year progressed, it became clear that there was no uniformity in how COVID-19 exposures were being handled, what assistance teachers were receiving, or what guidance was being followed to keep students and staff safe.

We consulted with experts — Dr. John Lowe, assistant vice chancellor for Inter-professional Health Security Training and Education, and Dr. James Lawler, director of International Programs and Innovation at the Global Center for Health Security, both at the University of Nebraska Medical Clinic. They told us that drastic measures needed to be taken or this pandemic would overrun our healthcare and education systems.

The NSEA Board of Directors met via Zoom on Sunday, Nov. 15, and vigorously discussed recommendations. Board members shared many concerns and debated numerous points but determined that they were in

agreement with the medical experts: If drastic measures weren’t taken, our medical systems would begin to crash, and many Nebraska school systems would close due to a lack of healthy staff.

The NSEA board authorized the president to seek help from the Nebraska State Board of Education. On Thursday, Nov. 19, a Petition for a Declaratory Order was signed by President Benson and filed by NSEA attorneys. You can find the petition at nsea.org/survey.

Dr. Lowe explained during our Nov. 19 Facebook live discussion that Nebraska must layer our preventative measures like Swiss cheese. No single intervention or prevention or layer solves all the issues. But masks, physical distancing, hygiene, limiting group size — all combine to be effective actions to slow the spread. If you haven’t had the chance, we encourage you to watch Dr. Lowe’s presentation on the NSEA Facebook page.

Thus, we believe that the NSEA board’s comprehensive call for action will provide the basic protection that is needed statewide.

Some Cannot Wait for Care

Like many of you, we have already begun to see the devastating effect of COVID-19 running unchecked.

Teresa Greve is a member of our NSEA staff. On Monday, Nov. 9, her son, a high school senior at the peak of health — who was scheduled for his physical exam for the Navy SEALs the next day — had to be taken by ambulance to Lincoln’s Bryan East Hospital Emergency Room, experiencing signs of a stroke. The staff at Bryan said he required care from a pediatric specialist at either Children’s, Boys Town or UNMC facilities in Omaha. Unfortunately, all those hospitals were full, so he was sent by ambulance to Kansas City. Teresa’s son recovered, but others can’t wait for care.

NSEA-Retired member Robert Beck, living in Missouri, passed away on Wednesday, Nov. 11. As his wife Jean shared, “It is not just people dying of COVID, but because of COVID people are dying, my husband, Robert, being one of them.

“We had to work our way through the Urgent Care and ER system with hours of waiting for something that possibly could have been prevented if he had not had to wait in ER lines for up to 10 hours, only to wait another five hours or more to be treated. All of which ended his life basically in the ER hallway because of (a) shortage of staff!”

A Powerful Weapon

Several Nebraska school superintendents have quietly shared that they fear they will lose their job if they enforce a mask mandate. Public Health directors have received death threats and have spotted drones flying over their homes. Leadership across our state could change that dynamic, but refuse to step up and put common good ahead of political ideology.

Nelson Mandela said “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”

With that in mind, we believe education is the only weapon that will defeat this disease. As educators, we must do what we do best — teach people how to fight this disease, layer by layer, step by step, until it is gone.

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State Retirement Plan Makes Gains

Annual Review Indicates Fund Continues to Gain Strength

The 2019-20 fiscal year marked another solid 12 months for the state's retirement plan for teachers.

Although the 2.4 percent return on investment for the year that ended June 30 fell well shy of the 7.5 percent assumed rate of return, the plan's funded ratio improved from 90.3 percent to 91.65 percent. The improvement in funded ratio was largely attributed to a lower than assumed cost of living adjustment of 0.52 percent. The assumed COLA is either 2.25 percent or 1 percent, depending on the plan member's tier, said consultant Pat Beckham.

A five-year return after "smoothing" of assets was at 6.4 percent, and even though that return was an actuarial loss, the school plan gained in value and "is very well funded," said Beckham. She said the median funded ratio of most large public pension plans across the country is in the 75 percent range.

Beckham is a consultant for Cavanaugh Macdonald Consulting and made her comments during the company's July 1, 2020, Actuarial Valuation Results report and annual message to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems (NPERS) Board of Directors on Nov. 16. Beckham also reported on the state-managed retirement plans for State Patrol employees and the state's judges.

Plans On Schedule 'to Meet Obligations'

Just seven years ago, following the Great Recession, the school retirement plan's funded ratio was 77 percent. A retirement plan's funded ratio is the level of assets in proportion to the plan's liabilities.

The State Patrol plan was funded at 88.13 percent on July 1, up from 87.34 percent a year ago. The plan for judges was at 97.34 percent, down slightly from 98.08 percent a year ago, with the drop attributed to a lower-than-forecast collection of court fees during the last fiscal year.

"The bottom line is that we are on schedule to meet obligations, and if not, we make adjustments," said Beckham.

The annual assessment reviews a snapshot of the plan taken on July 1 of each year – the first day of the state's fiscal year. The review also projects where the plan might be headed.

Change in Assumption to be Considered

In October 2016, the board reduced the actuarial assumed rate of investment return on plans from 8 to 7.5 percent annually, effective July 1, 2017. At the time, consultants said lowering of expectations was an industry trend, and that before the Great Recession, 60 percent of retirement plans used the 8 percent assumed rate. By 2016, that figure had fallen to 20 to 25 percent.

Lowering the assumed rate of return increases the chance that the rate will be met, and Beckham's firm recommended that the board considered lowering the rate to 7 percent. Under the proposal, the rate would drop a two-tenths of a percent next year and a tenth of a percent the following three years to get to the 7 percent mark.

In 2016, the drop from 8 percent to 7.5 percent, combined with a slight upward adjustment of mortality rates at the time, reduced the projected school plan funded rate to 84 percent in 2019. However, that drop was never realized, and the plan's sturdiness has strengthened each year since.

The NPERS board is expected to act on the rate of return recommendation at a December meeting. Any change would take place on July 1, 2021.



A 'Snapshot'

Beckham cautioned the board not to read too much into the numbers.

"Valuation is a snapshot of a single date. If we reviewed it today, it would look different," she said.

Of the three, only the school plan's market value improved, and that was a very modest uptick. The other plans saw a miniscule loss in value. The school plan's market value assets grew by \$70.8 million, to \$12.285 billion, a .05 percent increase. The market value assets for the

plan for state judges fell from \$195.7 million to \$194.5 million. The market value assets for the state patrol plan fell from \$436.6 million to \$435.8 million.

Beyond the statutorily required 2 percent state contribution each year, Beckham said the school plan will need no further state funding in the coming year, or in the next 30 years, assuming all current assumptions are met. Further, the school plan appears to be on track to be 100 percent funded by 2031.

The state contributes funding equal to two percent of teacher salaries each year. Education employees contribute 9.78 percent of salary, and school districts contribute the equivalent of 9.88 percent of that salary. The state plan covers all K-12 education employees in Nebraska except for those in Omaha, where education employees are covered in a separate system that predates the plan for teachers in the rest of the state.

The Largest Plan

The state patrol plan includes 931 members, and the plan for judges includes 347 lives. The school plan is by far the largest, with 94,126 active and retired educators either contributing to or benefitting from the plan in retirement. That number is up from the 91,909 school plan members a year ago.

Janis Elliott chairs the NPERS board, was a member of NPERS when she taught at Bellevue, is a former member of the NSEA Board of Directors and is now a physics teacher at Omaha Central High School.

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New Standards Support Teachers in Post-COVID-19 Education World



Dr. Kim Snyder,
Director,
NDE Statewide
Teacher and
Principal Support

There has Been Growth, 'Disruptovation' in Education as We Deal with the Pandemic

**Third in a series of invited articles
by Nebraska Department of Education
staff and partners.**

Nebraska school districts have reached a pivotal moment.

While the past few months have been uncomfortable for teachers and administrators, they would be remiss if they didn't recognize the powerful and courageous changes that are happening before their eyes. This change is so disruptive, it calls for a new word: disruptovate.

dis·rup'tō·vate' *v* – 1. *The act of disruption with the intention of creating innovation. (ex.) After teaching in the disruption of the pandemic, teachers were keen to disruptovate and embrace the new innovations used to meet the needs of their students and all members of their educational communities.*

Due to the current and growing intensity of COVID-19 throughout Nebraska, there has been growth — disruptovation, if you will — for Nebraska's school districts that cannot be ignored, including:

- Significant improvement in the ability to deliver digital-age pedagogy;
- Serious efforts to prioritize standards, content and teaching;
- Renewed conversations about mastery and grading;
- Recognition of marginalized student barriers.

Educators should be prioritizing their own mental health right now. Self-care strategies are needed to help all educators keep their balance and health as they deal with the enormity of their jobs. But there's a difference between the balance and health of educators and settling for comfort.

Comfort in the way things used to be sounds good, especially in light of the anxiety and stress of the past few months. However, as educators anticipate post-COVID-19 education, they need to consider that being comfortable may feel good — but for whom? Does the comfort of educators also translate into comfort for students and their families?

If there were a cure for COVID tomorrow, what would they do? Lean *BACK* into the comfort of how they used to do things and walk away from those ideas that make them uncomfortable, even though those uncomfortable moments created the silver linings listed above?

Or would they lean *INTO* the disruptovation

and work to grow and sustain digital age pedagogy, prioritizing, mastery, grading and equity? Will school districts choose equity and change? Or will they resort to the past and choose comfort?

All Nebraska educators must feel the call to action and lean *INTO* disruptovation. New standards are here and they give voice to teachers and school leaders to innovate for new and more effective ways forward to realize student success. That success requires educators who can confront and eliminate institutional bias and student marginalization and advocate for the families that may not be able to advocate for themselves.

These standards also call for educational organizations such as the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Educational Service Units (ESUs), and Nebraska's Educator Preparation Programs (EPPS) to lean *INTO* their own disruptovation to listen to, collaborate with, and serve teachers well so they can do the same for Nebraska students. All involved in Nebraska's educational system must hold themselves to these high standards.

The NDE is committed to leading and supporting all Nebraskans in learning, earning and living. With the changing landscape in educational roles and responsibilities, courageous and necessary shifts toward consistency in expectations within Nebraska's educational community *must* be the outcome of pandemic change.

Here are resources for educators interested in learning more. The Educator Effectiveness site is at:
education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness/

Have questions about Educator Effectiveness? Ask them here:

[http://bit.ly/effectivedquestions](https://bit.ly/effectivedquestions)

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards were approved by the Nebraska State Board of Education in April 2020. Those standards can also be found at:

education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness/

As director of Statewide Teacher and Principal Support, Dr. Kim Snyder works closely with Educational Service Units, institutes of Higher Education, and other educational partners, as well as with districts themselves, to provide statewide systems of support and development that ensure equitable access to effective teachers and principals for each student in Nebraska.

As part of a new and unique partnership, Dr. Julie Downing, a professional learning specialist at ESU No. 13, will support NDE in the development and implementation of the newly revised Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards.

As the Nebraska Leadership and Learning Network (NLLN) specialist, Ryan Ricenbaw collaborates with the office of Statewide Teacher and Principal Support to maximize the value and influence of school principals. The NLLN is charged with designing a framework of support to build critical equity-driven leadership skills as outlined in the Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards.



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
Network
Specialist

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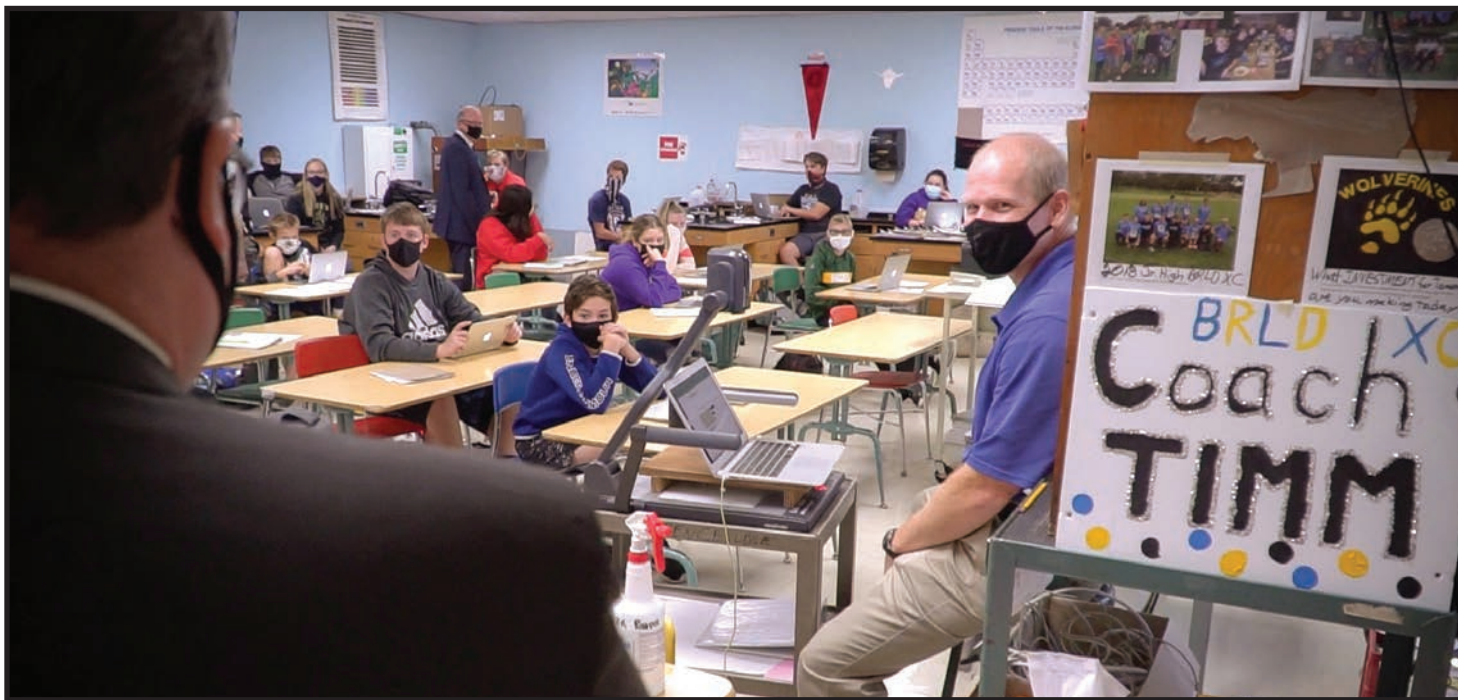


Photo by Drew Worster, Multimedia Specialist, Nebraska Department of Education

Surprise! Paul Timm is surprised in his Lyons-Decatur Northeast classroom by Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt, who delivered the news that Timm was selected to serve as Nebraska's 2021 Teacher of the Year.

The Influence of Others

Nebraska's 50th Teacher of the Year says His Teachers were Inspiring Mentors

Like most teachers, Paul Timm was heavily influenced by the great teachers he enjoyed growing up.

In particular, he cites the effect of his high school agriculture teacher and his high school science teacher.

"My science teacher was inspirational. He had high expectations," said Timm.

"My ag teacher was a mentor, and not just for myself. I saw him take kids that, as a teacher today, I'd consider have rough home lives, without much direction. He got them interested in something that could eventually become a skill or career."

In fact, Timm recalls that he was with ag teacher Myron Schoch at a national FFA leadership conference when he realized he was destined to teach.

"It was a four-day experience with students from across the country, and it was just inspiring," said Timm.

He had considered careers in engineering, the sciences and farming. He even gave brief thought to a dual farming-and-teaching career that he ultimately realized would be tough to do.

"I realized that my passion was working with kids," he said. "I just knew from my junior year that I was going to be a teacher."

That epiphany has worked out well – especially for the secondary students at Lyons-Decatur Northeast Public Schools. Their teacher of seventh grade life science, eighth grade earth and space science, ninth grade biology, applied science and an anatomy and physiology course, has been named Nebraska's 2021 Teacher of the Year. Today he works with young minds in the same classroom where his science teacher, Gene Nelson, set such high expectations years ago.

Timm is Nebraska's 50th Teacher of the Year. Other 2021 finalists were Michael Sandstrom of Chadron High School and Sarah Staples-Farmer of Lincoln East High School. All will be honored at a pandemic-delayed luncheon with the Nebraska State Board of Education in February.

'An Opportunity'

Timm believes the Teacher of the Year

Paul Timm

- Grades 7-12 science teacher, Lyons-Decatur Northeast.
- Established Lyons-Decatur Northeast Health Sciences Academy and Lyons-Decatur Northeast Research programs, National Honor Society sponsor, Quiz Bowl coach, Student Assistant Team Coordinator, cross country and track coach.
- Lead negotiator, Lyons-Decatur Education Association
- Bachelor's degree in agriculture education, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Master's degree in entomology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



designation is more "a position and an opportunity" than an award. From that perspective, he developed some thoughts on what he hopes to accomplish during his term.

First, he wants to bring encouragement to teachers who are hurting from the stress and overload of the pandemic.

"They need some hope. They want to do what they've been trained to do, what they love to do, and they don't know if they're going to get to do it on a daily basis. I hope I get a chance to speak some hope into people's lives and tell them that

what they're doing matters," he said.

Second, Timm hopes to focus on student mental and behavioral health.

"I see kids hurting, and in some cases it's extreme. I want to be able to bring some light to getting help for kids who need help," he said.

He notes there are 10 recognized Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and says there is discussion that COVID-19 should be recognized as Number 11.

"There's not a person that didn't come back into our school systems this year who hasn't been traumatized somehow by the change in life that we've had over the past six months. And that's kids as well as adults."

His focus on mental health may mean going to the Nebraska Legislature to seek change. "I'm not going to pretend to be the expert at that, but I'm willing to learn," he said.

Finally, he'd like to put a focus on outdoor education and inquiry, a keen area of interest and expertise of his.

Part of the Joy

Spend any time at all with Timm and you know quickly that he is passionate and enthusiastic about teaching and learning. Among his other teaching duties, he leads an entomology science inquiry course of his own creation, supported by the master's in entomology he earned from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Timm incorporates inquiry methods throughout his courses and may be one of the leaders in teaching inquiry-based courses in Nebraska.

"The discovery in the search for new things is part of the joy. I think kindergartners do that better than anyone," he said. "You get them outside and they find that rock and, 'Oh, man, look at this!'"

"We're constantly talking about career readiness and college readiness, but we don't know what careers are going to be in 10 years because things are changing so fast," he said. "I think teaching the scientific and engineering method of discovery is a good way to go about preparing those kids for the changes they're going to see."

Timm's seventh grade course revolves around birds, with each student assigned to a specific species. For instance, a student assigned to study the red-headed woodpecker will collect data, might look back at Nebraska's habitat historically, might review how that habitat has changed over the past 150 years and how that habitat change affected ecosystems, food webs of that bird and even Native Americans, bringing a world view into consideration.

"The inquiry forces these other discussions and teachable moments that crosscut into other curricular areas," said Timm.

A Happy Ending

His decision to teach, and the extent of Schoch's influence, were reinforced during Timm's college years. Timm recalls that a high school student who was a couple of years older became a proficient welder under Schoch's tutelage. The student got into an FFA welding contest, placed well and earned a community college scholarship.

Later, in pursuit of his ag education degree, Timm had to take a welding course. The teacher of that course? The student from his hometown who had progressed from high school student to community college student to community college instructor. The community college

Sandstrom, Staples-Farmer are Finalists

Two finalists for the 2021 Nebraska Teacher of the Year honor will join recipient Paul Timm at a luncheon with the Nebraska State Board of Education in February.

Michael Sandstrom is a grades 9-12 social studies and history teacher at Chadron High School and a member of the Chadron City Education Association.



Staples-Farmer **Sandstrom**

Staples-Farmer teaches grades 10-12 English at Lincoln East High School and is a member of the Lincoln Education Association. She is a past president of the Norris Association of Educators.

Sandstrom's application said one of his goals is to promote media literacy skills. "By honing these skills, students will become better equipped to live in the twenty-first century world beyond the classroom," he said.

Staples-Farmer said her teaching and selected content is inspired by social justice work, with readings of authors who have faced injustice but persevered. "Like these authors, I hope that my students can persevere through times of injustice and write to change the world."

faculty saw that he was not only a top-notch welder but was great at working with people.

"That's why people get into teaching," said Timm. "I hope that I'm being that sort of mentor and teacher to the students I'm working with."

That story is a great example – an example that every teacher can understand, a reason for celebration each and every day.

"Remember why we got into the profession, and that the joy is still there," said Timm. "The kids still view us as important people – like Myron and Gene were in my life."

And as we now know that story had a very happy ending.

An advertisement for BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska. It features a young person with brown hair looking at a laptop screen. The screen shows a video call with a woman. Overlaid on the left is a blue graphic with the text "WHATEVER LIFE BRINGS, WE'RE THERE WITH YOU" and "NebraskaBlue.com". At the bottom is the BlueCross BlueShield Nebraska logo and the text "An independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association."/>

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'A Breaking Point'

Survey: Educators Overwhelmed, Student Needs Unmet

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has Nebraska educators overwhelmed in the classroom and worried about the safety of all in the school community.

That was one of the top messages from a statewide survey of NSEA members in late October. The survey assessed member views and concerns on teaching during the pandemic. Results were released on Nov. 16, the first day of American Education Week.

"Responses left little doubt that many educators are at the breaking point," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "They are concerned that the needs of students are not being met. They are worried about their health and safety and that of their students and families."

"Many teachers are having to teach both in-person and remotely at the same time. That is exhausting teachers and making it nearly impossible to provide quality teaching and learning," said Benson.

The result is this: one in four teachers said that in the next year they would retire, would quit the profession, or are considering leaving the profession.

NSEA also issued a list of action items (see list at right), urging school leaders, parents and the public to use common sense measures and tools at their disposal to provide safety and relief for students and staff.

Benson also announced the filing of a petition seeking a declaratory order from the State Board of Education (see box) that would require Nebraska school districts to follow established safety criteria.

Not Enough Plan Time

Eighty-nine percent of respondents from the Lincoln and Omaha school districts do not believe their district's current learning model is equitably meeting the needs of all students. In both districts teachers are teaching in-person and remote learners simulta-

neously. Statewide, which includes some districts offering in-person teaching only, 59 percent are concerned their district's learning model is not equitable for all students.

Benson said educators desperately want to do the best job they can for their students.

"Teachers are not provided adequate plan time and, with a shortage of substitute teachers, they are having to cover the classes of colleagues who are in quarantine or who are ill, so are losing the plan time they do have," she said. "The situation is unsustainable."

Eighty-six percent reported feeling overwhelmed, stressed, frustrated or worried. A majority said their district is not listening to educators on teaching and learning issues.

One in Four Will Quit

In some cases, teachers have left their jobs just months into the school year.

"Without immediate action to help our educators, we are about to lose many more," Benson said.

It is more important, however, that efforts are made to prevent more loss of life.

"We took these actions after talking to medical experts, after talking to members, after reviewing the survey and comments from members," said NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell. "That is why NSEA joined the University of Nebraska Medical Center in seeking a statewide mask mandate."

The NSEA also called for a 'time out' on youth and high school sports and extracurricular activities until January.

"We understand the desire to compete. But first and foremost, we must maintain delivery of a sound academic education in a safe environment," said Benson.

More survey details and member comments are found on the next two pages. Find all survey results at:

nsea.org/survey

ACT NOW

NSEA is joining with medical experts from UNMC and across Nebraska in asking the governor to immediately issue Directed Health Measures that will call for:



- A statewide mask mandate;
- Limitation of 10 people for indoor or outdoor gatherings;
- Temporarily close bars and suspend indoor dining and launch a Takeout Nebraska campaign;
- Dedensify classrooms with alternative staffing and student attendance patterns, especially when students are eating;
- In addition, the NSEA calls for a moratorium — a time out if you will — on all in-person youth and high school sports and extracurricular activities until January;
- Suspension of evaluations for non-probationary teachers;
- Make curriculum adjustments and relax pacing. Lost instructional time may be due to cleaning, sanitizing, mask breaks and technical issues with remote learners. Teachers know their students and will keep them advancing academically;
- Providing plan time — not more training — as allowed by the recent Nebraska Department of Education guidance posted at: <https://launchne.com/commish/>
- Include more administrators and certificated staff without full time teaching responsibilities in covering classes instead of taking away teacher plan time and increasing the numbers of students in class;
- Districts must provide factual COVID numbers to the public and school staff;
- Listen to educator input, show empathy and leadership.

NSEA to State Board: Issue Safety Directive

On April 1, Nebraska schools closed as the state faced a 7-day average of 24 cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 residents. In November, that number was 105 cases per 100,000.

With that in mind, NSEA filed a petition asking the State Board of Education to issue an order, under Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Rule 62, declaring that safety interventions and protocol recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) be adopted as the specific safety criteria under which schools will operate.

NSEA President Jenni Benson said uncontrolled transmission has put the Nebraska school system in crisis. On November 17, the White House Coronavirus Task Force issued a report indicating Nebraska has 101 or more new cases per 100,000 population, which is the sixth highest infection rate in the country.

Benson said NDE Rule 10 requires schools to maintain "safe, healthful, and sanitary conditions within school buildings(s) and on school grounds." Statute also allows the board to make investigations and reports for formation of policies and plans, or evaluating school programs. "The state board must do exactly that," said Benson, "if we are to keep our schools open and provide a safe learning environment for students and staff in this pandemic."

The petition also asks that the board "take such remedial action as is necessary to enforce safety accreditation standards."

Pandemic Survey by the Numbers

Responses are Rapid, from Across the State

When NSEA asks the opinion of Nebraska teachers, those teachers answer.

More than 6,500 teachers responded* to the survey, which was open for a little more than a week, and more than 2,200 took the time to add comments specific to their situation, from their perspective.

The numbers on the chart on these pages are broken down by NSEA's 13 organizational specialist units — each one of which is staffed by one or more of the Association's field representatives. Roughly the same percentage of active members completed the survey in each unit.

A more complete look at the results can be found on the NSEA website, as can a video of the latest NSEA Facebook live, with NSEA President Jenni Benson, Executive Director Maddie Fennell and guest speaker Dr. John-Martin Lowe, Ph.D., assistant vice chancellor for Interprofessional Health Security Training and Education at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. To find those details, go to:

nsea.org/survey

*About 120 members who responded did not specify their local association. That number is not included under the column titled Number of Responses.

How Safe is Your County?

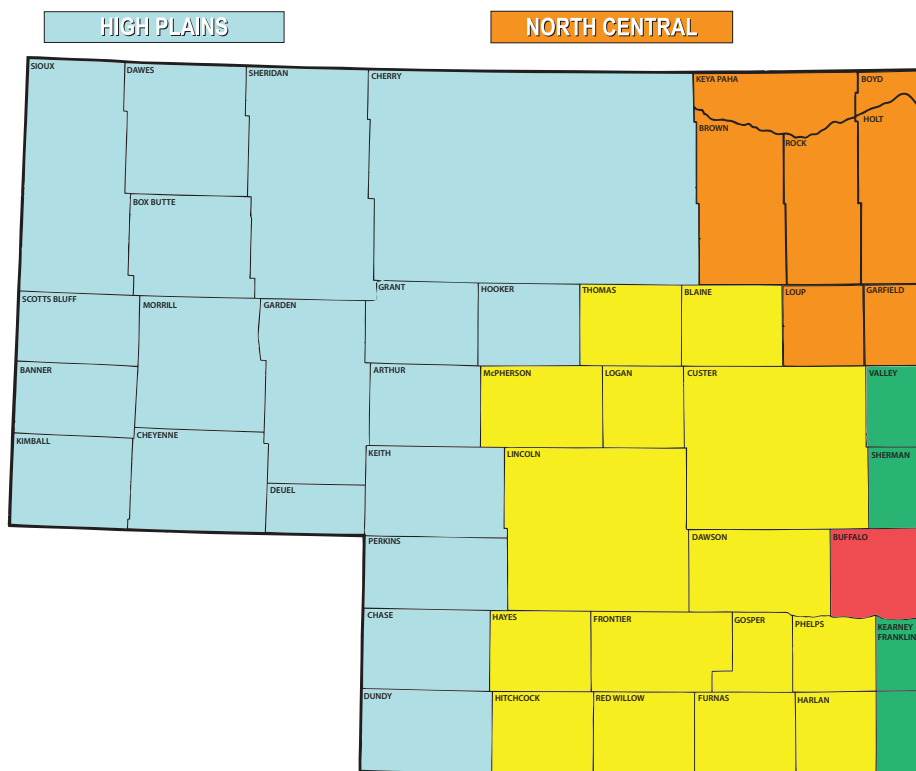
How risky might it be for you to host 15 people at a football watch party in Merrick County?

According to a website managed by Georgia Tech (at the time of publication) the risk level showed a 73 percent likelihood that you would become infected.

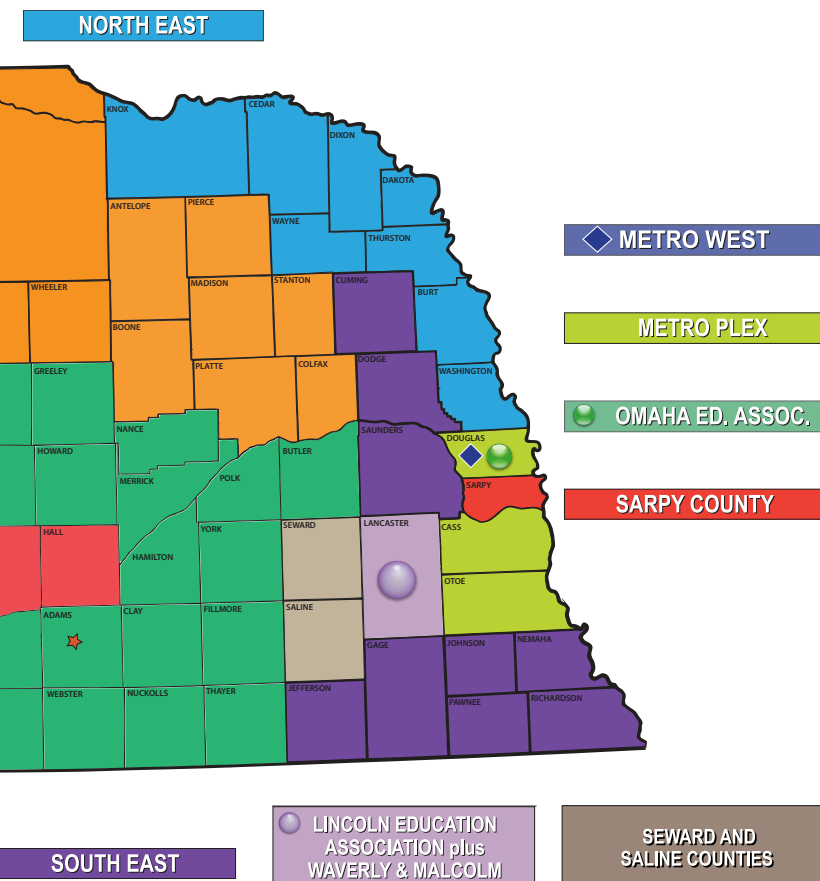
The risk level is the estimated chance that at least one COVID-19 positive individual would be present at the event, given the size of the event.

The likelihood is also based on the event size and location. For instance, a 15-member gathering in Franklin County would be only slightly less likely — 58 percent — than Merrick County to be host to a virus-positive individual. To check your county data, go to:

<https://bit.ly/nebraskacounty>



	Number of Responses <small>NOTE: not every question required an answer</small>	Do you believe your current learning model is equitably meeting the needs of all students?	Do you think should be man STAFF S
		YES	YES
HIGH PLAINS	300	73%	75%
LINCOLN	1254	14%	98%
METRO WEST	439	15%	97%
METROPLEX	549	37%	92%
NORTH CENTRAL	345	83%	84%
NORTHEAST	346	59%	87%
OMAHA	1233	11%	96%
SARPY	442	55%	96%
SEWARD/SALINE CO.	88	73%	93%
SOUTH CENTRAL	303	90%	90%
SOUTHEAST	367	68%	87%
TRICITY	416	69%	91%
WEST CENTRAL	314	78%	85%
STATEWIDE	6,396	41%	92%



k masks dated for: TUDENTS	I have enough plan time to prepare for my teaching workload:		How has the COVID pandemic affected your long-term professional planning?	
	YES	TRUE	NOT TRUE	NOT LEAVING
	72%	65%	35%	80%
	97%	27%	73%	71%
	97%	25%	75%	72%
	91%	45%	55%	81%
	83%	63%	37%	85%
	87%	58%	42%	84%
	96%	22%	78%	69%
	97%	47%	53%	79%
	93%	56%	44%	78%
	90%	69%	31%	83%
	87%	54%	46%	82%
	90%	49%	51%	83%
	83%	62%	38%	83%
	92%	41%	59%	76%

"I've been in mass casualty situations and in combat zones in Afghanistan. I've been in a bullet treatment centers in very austere conditions. And I have never, ever, been as frightened about the status of a health system as I am about the status of our health system in Nebraska right now."

Dr. James Lawler, MD, MPH,
executive director of International Health Programs
and Innovation at the University of Nebraska Medical
Center, speaking at the unveiling of the 'Do Right, Do
Now' campaign at the Nebraska State Capitol on Nov.
19.

"In Omaha and Lincoln and in hospitals across the state we are right on the cusp of having to turn away patients that are coming in for strokes, for labor and deliveries for traumas."

Dr. John-Martin Lowe, Ph.D., assistant vice chancellor
for Interprofessional Health Security Training and
Education at the University of Nebraska Medical
Center, speaking on a Facebook Live event hosted by
NSEA on Nov. 19.

"Over the last few weeks, we have become overrun with Covid in our area. It is no longer a big city problem."

Dr. Matt Bruner, Chief Medical Officer
Regional West Medical Center,
speaking to the Scottsbluff
City Council on Nov. 16

"... what if the big hospitals are full? What if the Lincoln and the Omaha's and Kansas City's are full? And then we're stretched to take care of a patient we're not equipped to take care of."

Ruth Stephens, CEO,
Pawnee County Memorial Hospital in Pawnee City,
where two of the hospital's 11 beds contained patients
with mild COVID-19 symptoms. Stephens made her
remarks in an interview with News Channel Nebraska
in mid-November. Like many smaller hospitals,
Stephens said patients that require more care, such as
respiratory support, are sent to metro hospitals.

"Neither our staff nor the state contact tracing teams are able to consistently provide timely follow-up due to the huge load of case investigations and contract tracings."

Michele Bever, Executive Director,
South Heartland Health, Hastings
as reported in the Hastings Tribune

"This is all going to be bigger than any final score."

**Pete Ferguson, coordinator of the Youth Development
Team at Lincoln Public Schools**



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And the Survey Respondents Said...

Educators Across Nebraska Struggling in Face of COVID-19 Pandemic

More than 6,500 member educators responded to the NSEA survey that asked about teaching in a pandemic — a superb response rate by any measure.

That number is nearly 20 percent of NSEA's 28,000 members, which calculates to a margin of error of plus or minus one percent.

More than 2,200 survey respondents also added comments, with each comment reviewed by NSEA staff and leadership.

"Many of these are heart-wrenching," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "Our members are hurting for their students, they are exhausted and they are asking for relief and assistance from local and state leadership."

Here is a sampling of member remarks:

I am planning on retiring at the end of the year. I hope I can make it that long. A year ago, I was thinking I was leaving the profession in good hands as I watched the amazing young professionals work their magic daily. Now I don't know how many of them will be returning next year. They cannot do both in-person and Zoom teaching at the same time. Something has to give, or we will lose these professionals forever."

K-5 students are not getting the help they need at home to complete assignments, and teachers are struggling to keep up with the pace of lessons that allow for ZERO time to reteach and make sure that students are mastering any of the skills they are learning.

I cry almost every single day from sheer exhaustion and being overwhelmed. I now teach Zoomers and Roomers and this changes each week due to families quarantining at different times — this means that the materials that I am preparing to send home changes each week based on who is where. I am trying to come up with activities that will fit the needs of this hybrid classroom.

We are on the front lines and it falls in our laps if the students succeed or if they fail and we were set up for failure trying to navigate a hybrid classroom with NO adjustment to the curriculum. The district cut out a few tests and lessons here or there but that isn't what matters. The curriculum needs to be adjusted to fit the needs of both remote and in-person learning simultaneously.

As cases continue to rise in the county and I have had close friends lose family members to COVID, I continue to become more and more worried about the safety of students and staff

in school. At the beginning of the year, we were told we would be sent home if the county went to red. Now, the district has changed the rules and has said we will stay in school as it works with the health department.

I feel like teachers are being pushed to a breaking point. It makes me sad to think about all the talent and love that will walk out of classrooms this year as teachers make the tough decision to leave their careers. On the whole, teachers are a group who are willing to do almost anything to help their students. However, this is now coming at too heavy a cost.

It was difficult and felt sometimes impossible before COVID, but now it is both physically and mentally impossible. I come to work every day feeling defeated because it is impossible to get one-third of my job done. I am behind in everything. There are several students that I have not even been able to talk to or touch base with this year and the 1st quarter is already over.

Remote learning is not good for young children. It's better than nothing, but not ideal. There is so much that I can't do over a computer!

I am a very capable veteran teacher, and this is by far the hardest thing I have done in my career. It makes me not like the job

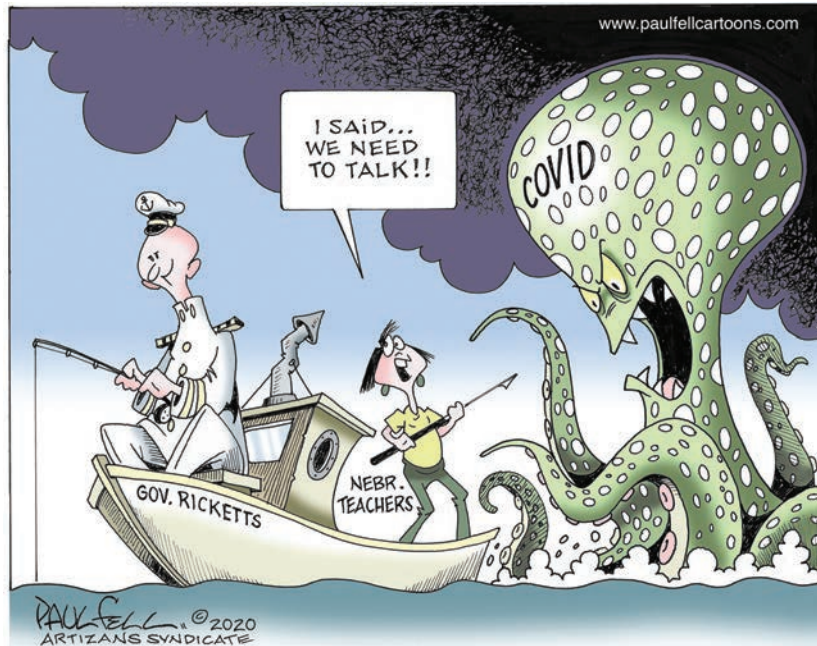
I have loved for years. We cannot continue to give of ourselves at this level. I am incredibly concerned for all the young teachers with young families and the amount of stress this early in their careers. We are going to lose good teachers.

Honestly, it isn't even the extra work, the stress, the time...it is that I am scared. I am scared that things are getting worse and will continue to get worse and that I have no options.

It's the general public and not educators or the administrators who present the current problem. Politics and concern about personal rights are clouding the judgment of usually responsible citizens. Until everyone works together, and a safe vaccine is found, this will be our reality. I am very close to retirement but will stay the course as long as I am able.

I'm doing more planning and prep to pull it off effectively but more than anything I'm just FRANTICALLY trying to keep all the balls in the air when managing a Zoom meeting full of first graders and 18 first graders in real life at the same time. The work I'm doing during the day is way more exhausting than it's ever been, and that's what will lead to my burnout.

We're all just so tired. And overwhelmed and sad and scared. I know that is how the whole world is feeling also.



At Sea in a Pandemic: Prize-winning Nebraska cartoonist Paul Fell provided this take on the pandemic to the NSEA. For his years of support of public education, Fell was recipient of NSEA's Champion of Education Award at the 2020 NSEA Delegate Assembly.

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Heroes Will Stop the Virus

Note: This first appeared in the Lincoln Journal Star on Wednesday, Nov. 18.



Dr. Matt Blomstedt

“

The biggest threat to continuing education in person is the community spread outside the school. That spread is now threatening the capacity of hospitals, nursing homes, businesses and schools.

”

By Dr. Matt Blomstedt Nebraska Commissioner of Education

I get tested for COVID-19 every week at a Test Nebraska site. The test results offer some comfort as I work with officials across the state and combat the risk of spreading the virus.

It also gives some indication of whether or not the people I am around may be contagious. I have been in two settings where I later learned that I may have been exposed to the virus. In both cases, the COVID-positive individuals were in a hearing room in the state Capitol building.

In one case, I received an email on Oct. 24 about the possibility of a COVID-positive case and in the other case read reports in the news last week that Sen. Mike Groene likely had COVID during an Education Committee hearing on Oct. 27.

I was wearing a mask, as were most participants at that hearing. Senator Groene and some others were not wearing masks. I understand the risks and have to accept those risks in my profession.

But as I read about my possible exposure in the newspaper, it bothered me because it reminds me of just how much this virus is spreading in our community and that some citizens in this state are not taking the risks seriously.

Collective Health is Susceptible

Nebraska school leaders, teachers, coaches and staff have worked hard to create safe environments. The biggest threat to continuing education in person is the community spread outside of the school. That spread is now threatening the capacity of hospitals, nursing homes, businesses and schools.

As Nebraska continues to see cases grow, individual and collective health is susceptible. I want businesses to stay as open as long possible. There is no federal relief money left to keep businesses afloat. People may lose their jobs and their livelihoods if we are forced to lock down for an extended period of time.

The pressure on schools to stay open is part of the need for a functional, safe environment for children of employees, including health care professionals. That is something that is at risk right now. The cases of spread impact schools as we cannot keep up with the necessary contact tracing, the balance of remote and in-person

instruction, and all the additional burdens that teachers, janitors, principals, paras and others have absorbed.

A Deadly Divide

Like many Nebraskans, I'm suffering from COVID-19 fatigue. I'm sick of restrictions. I'm tired of wearing masks, not seeing my family in person and having disputes with loved ones about the seriousness of this virus.

I'm tired of people saying, "the virus has less than a 1 percent death rate, so it is not that serious." Let's do the math on that statement. Out of the whole population of Nebraska, one half of 1 percent is about 10,000 people.

Further, as the virus continues to move into the older population, the percentage of deaths will rise. A very significant percentage of this population are slow to recover, and many will have a long-term disability. Perhaps you don't think that is a problem, but I do.

We are fortunate to live in the United States. We are afforded the opportunity to have diverse points of view. But right now, the divide over the virus is deadly. Our hospitals will soon be overburdened. We will be unable to continue the level of care needed to keep our loved ones alive.

Hospitals will have less room for car accident victims and patients who need emergency surgeries. They will have less room for patients suffering heart attacks and strokes and those starting to feel the effects of other illnesses. They will have less room for end-of-life care, and they will be making difficult choices regarding whom to treat and whom to send home.

'Be the Heroes We Need'

The odds are you know someone who has had a serious bout with COVID-19. By the end of the year, you will know more. If you gather with friends and family this holiday season the virus will spread and odds are we will have a hard time keeping businesses and schools open.

If you want to beat those odds you need to follow the advice of public health officials. Gov. Pete Ricketts has been consistent in sharing the need to avoid the three Cs: crowded places, confined spaces and close contacts.

Avoid gathering in groups where you cannot maintain 6 feet of distance from others. Wear a mask. Do the right things, right now. Be the heroes we need right now to stop the spread of the virus in our communities.

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- Curtis Reese, M.S. in Biology Graduate

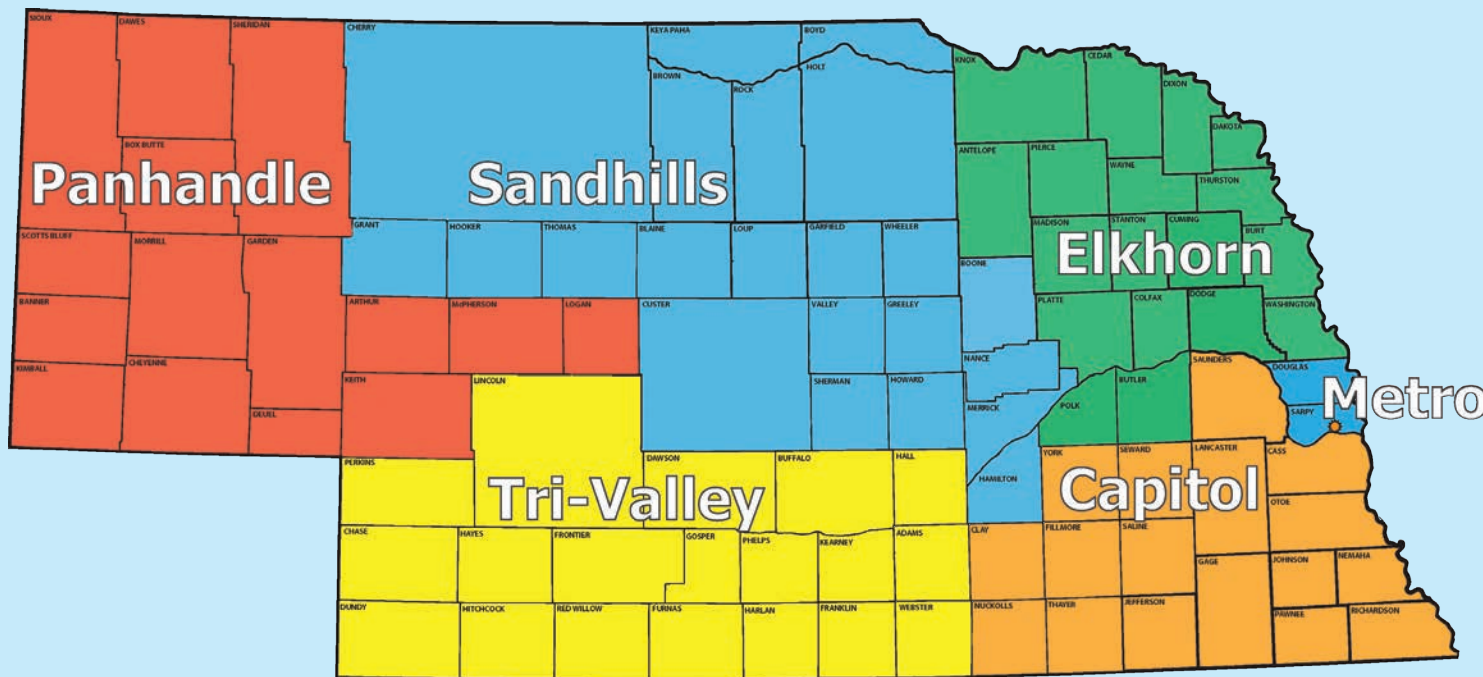
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☀ In order to comply with NEA guidelines, Springfield/Platteview Education Association will be included in Capitol District.

Your Leadership Needed!

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."

— John F. Kennedy,
35th American President

Teachers are natural-born leaders and your Association thrives on active, effective leadership at all levels.

Beginning next year, several leadership positions within NSEA will be open.

The window for filing for the more than two dozen elected positions on NSEA district boards and the NSEA Board of Directors will open on Friday, Jan. 1, and will close on Sunday, Feb. 7.

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. 19. Voting will close at midnight on Sunday, March 14.

To file, go to the NSEA website and click on '2021 District Elections.' Select your district, and choose the office you seek. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA mem-

bership 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.

NSEA encourages minorities to seek office at all levels. NSEA's Minority Involvement 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 50-word statement to: NSEA Elections, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. State which office you are seeking.

In all cases, the deadline for filing for office is Sunday, Feb. 7. NSEA's website is at:

www.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 on Friday, Feb. 19. On that date, members with valid email addresses on file will receive an email de-

tailoring the process.

NSEA members without a valid email address on file will receive a postcard explaining the voting. If you do not receive a postcard or an email from NSEA by Thursday, March 11, call 1-800-742-0047.

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

membership@nsea.org

THE VACANCIES

A statewide (see map) look at NSEA leadership opportunities for 2021-22:

ELKHORN DISTRICT

- President
- Vice President
- One seat on the executive committee
- One seat on the NSEA Board

CAPITOL DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- One seat on the executive committee
- One seat on the NSEA Board

METRO DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Seven seats on the executive committee (subdistricts 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10)
- One seat on the NSEA Board

PANHANDLE DISTRICT

- Vice President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Four seats on the executive committee (Areas 1, 2, 3, 4)

SANDHILLS DISTRICT

- President
- Vice President
- One seat on the executive committee
- One seat on the NSEA Board

TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT

- President
- Vice President
- Three seats on the district executive committee (one each from the East, Central and West subdistricts).
- One seat on the NSEA Board.

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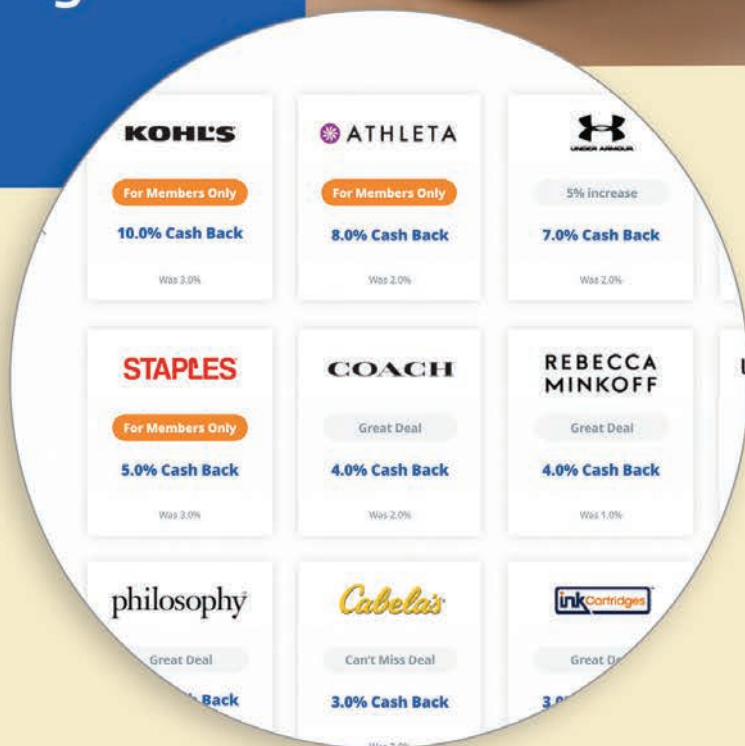


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Members who already have a Rakuten account should still register on the NEA Discount Marketplace page at neamb.com/marketplace in order to be eligible for offers for NEA members only. Members may request their original and NEA Rakuten accounts be consolidated by calling Rakuten toll free at 415-908-2200 and providing the email address they used when they set up their NEA account. That way, their cash back will be applied across their merged accounts.

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The No. 1 Way Educators Can Stay Healthy in Winter

Follow These Tips to Foster Healthy Habits

By NEA Member Benefits

Schools are a breeding ground for stomach flu, colds, viruses and other bugs, especially during the cold winter months when students (and educators) spend most of their time inside. And now, whether you're teaching remotely or in-person, there's the extra stress of avoiding COVID-19.

"Being cooped up inside with many other people is a natural incubator for recycling germs," explains Victor Sierpina, MD, professor of integrative medicine at University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, Texas. Since children share books, computers, pens and pencils as they do schoolwork, there's a good chance they're also sharing viral and bacterial illnesses.

The good news: You can lessen the risk of getting sick. Sure, illness can spread like wildfire throughout a school or family, but healthy habits can, too.

In fact, Lysol offers a program with extensive course materials to keep students, and you, healthy, including resources for teaching at home.

Check out the Lysol program. Then, follow these five tips for incorporating healthy habits in the classroom—and at home with your family—and staving off illness in the process.



Remember your ABCs:

Regardless of which grade you teach, it's never too late to re-establish the importance of singing your ABCs (at least while washing your hands). "Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs, but a quick rinse with warm water is not enough," says Joseph Rubino, Director of Microbiology at RB, the makers of Lysol. Health authorities like the CDC, for example, recommend washing your hands with soap and running water for the amount of time it takes to sing the ABCs twice.



Clean up:

Germs are hiding where you least expect them. Playground equipment, computer keyboards, desks, book bags, iPads and lockers are common culprits. According to Environmental Health Services in Minnesota, students, along with the rest of us, carry 1,500 germs on each square centimeter of our hands. A faucet has 229,000 germs per square inch—many of which land on our hands. The

antidote, of course, is keeping things clean. "Since children can touch and retouch up to 300 surfaces in 30 minutes, it is important to disinfect the most commonly touched areas to help prevent the spread of illness," says Rubino, who recommends keeping a container of Lysol Disinfecting Wipes, along with other types of available disinfectants, handy to wipe down desks, door handles, light switches and other "hot" zones.



Get sanitized:

With jam-packed class schedules, it can be tough to get students to a washbasin. When kids are late to the lunchroom, racing to beat the bell before class or on a field trip, hand washing often falls to the bottom of the priority list. The good news: When used correctly, studies show alcohol-based hand sanitizers are the next best way to kill germs. Experts recommend keeping hand sanitizers in high-traffic zones (just outside your classroom door is a good spot), and reminding students to keep their hands to themselves—and out of their noses and mouths.



Keep moving:

"Physical activity improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles and increases self-esteem," says Rubino. "It also reduces stress." Encourage students to be active for at least one hour each day, whether that means walking home from school, playing catch or swimming in the pool. You can incorporate regular fitness breaks into your class schedule. Take 10 minutes and ask students to get out of their seats and stretch, or push back their chairs and play a quick game of dodge ball. The goal, of course, is to show students that fitness can be fun. The same goes for you and your family if you're teaching or learning remotely.



Eat colorfully:

Color is an indicator of disease-fighting nutrients, so it's important to ensure kids get a rainbow of color on their plates. Not only are fruits and vegetables fabulous snacks, they also offer a vehicle for students to get the nutrients they need to boost immunity. Games offer another great way to teach kids which foods are healthy and which are better left untouched. You can even introduce a new fruit or vegetable each week and challenge students to come up with simple recipes.

Find more health and wellness tips at:

neamb.com/family-and-wellness

2021-22 Leadership Deadlines Are Near

Consider NSEA-R Office; Membership Rebate Offered to All

This year, there are numerous opportunities to assume a leadership role in NSEA-Retired. Members seeking leadership positions will be able to file beginning Wednesday, Jan. 6, by selecting 'Elections' at:

nsea.org/retired

The filing deadline is Friday, Feb. 12.

Open positions on the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors, each for a three-year term, include one seat each from the Capitol District and Metro District. Terms begin Aug. 15, 2021.

Retired members will also elect delegates to the April 23-24 NSEA Delegate Assembly. Elected will be four delegates from Capitol District; five delegates from Metro District; three delegates each from Tri-Valley and Elkhorn districts; and one each from Panhandle and Sandhills districts. Two at-large delegates will also be chosen.

The NEA Representative Assembly delegate allocation was adjusted from last year to one delegate from Metro and Capitol districts combined; one delegate from Elkhorn, Sandhills, Tri-Valley and Panhandle districts and out-of-state combined; and three at-large delegates. RA delegates and NSEA-Retired board delegates also submit a 50-word biography when they register.

Pre-Retired or Retired Lifetime Membership Rebate Offered

To show appreciation for all teachers are doing and have done, NSEA-Retired is offering a \$75 rebate on the NSEA Pre-Retired/Retired Lifetime memberships for anyone joining before June 1, 2021.

After retirement, NSEA-Retired members continue with classroom liability insurance, access to NEA member benefits, opportunities to support and assist educators and NSEA, free newsletters, and conference and lobbying opportunities.

To join, go to nsea.org/retired and select 'Join Now'. The cost for NEA-Retired and NSEA-Retired memberships are shown, and installment payments are available, depending upon the time of joining. Once you join as a new member, you will receive a \$75 rebate from the NSEA-Retired dues.

You may also join, or get further details, by emailing NSEA's Rebecca Smith at:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

Virtual Conference a Success

It wasn't a typical conference for members of NSEA-Retired, but more than 80 members attended the Association's annual

We are Stronger, Better Together!

By Maureen Nickels

The greater share of my circle of friends and family are uncomfortable or choose not to discuss politics.

Yet almost everything about our lives is touched by a political decision, whether it be local, state or federal in nature. It's important to me to have a voice in those decisions, first and foremost, by voting. Besides voting, I give financially to the organizations that work tirelessly for elected officials who are champions for issues near and dear to me.

Public education has been the center of my professional career and because of it I've been a lifelong member of the NEA, NSEA and, currently, my retired local association, the Platte Valley Retired Educators Association. NEA's Political Action Fund, The NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, works to support and elect public-school champions on the federal level up and down the ballot regardless of political party. This fund receives a monthly contribution from me.

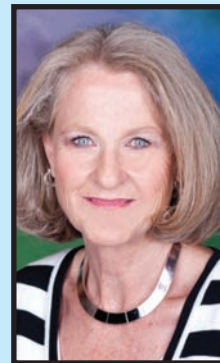
I started my professional career as an elementary teacher in the mid-1970's. In 2000 I left the classroom to work as an organizational specialist for NSEA. For 49 years I faithfully gave monthly to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education. I never had a second thought to increasing my monthly contribution when I could. Even after retirement, I continue to give monthly.

Why? NEA's charge is to advance public education across the United States and to create a public education system where every student, no matter where they live, can succeed and be a productive citizen. The NEA has joined coalitions on issues affecting retired educators on topics ranging from Social Security to health care to prescription drug prices. To use the NSEA-Retired catchphrase, "now, more than ever," it is important that we ALL come together to support true federal and state leadership.

There are many opportunities that NSEA active educators and retired members can pursue to support strong public education.

If you are committed to such efforts, your financial support is needed at national, state, and local levels. If we ALL do a little, it will most certainly provide a lot for our children and for our own futures. Consider joining me in small ways where you can make a BIG difference. Though blind, deaf and mute, Helen Keller was visionary with her words: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Join me in giving to the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education, the NSEA Children's Fund, and other pro-public education entities.



Nickels

Fall Conference via the magic of Zoom teleconferencing in mid-October. The conference also went "long distance" by attracting viewers from out of state.

Featured were Nebraska's own Astronaut Clayton Anderson, Nebraska native and International United Nations official Dr. Natalie Hahn, and SHIP/Medicare representative Alicia Jones.

Participants had a brief opportunity to visit using the convenience of Zoom's breakout rooms. Acknowledging the reduced cost of offering such a conference and the increased need of food banks, the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors donated \$5,000 to the Foodbank of the Heartland.

Lobby Day to Go Virtual

Speaking of virtual meetings, NSEA-Retired's Governance/Lobby Day will also be a virtual event.

At the event, retired members typically

meet at NSEA Headquarters for a briefing before crossing the street to the State Capitol to talk to state senators about education issues. For 2021, the Governance/Lobby Day has been set on Monday, Feb. 22. It will include opportunities to visit with state senators, hear updates on legislative bills, and get assistance in contacting local representatives. Watch this space in January and February for further details.

Insurance Update on Website

Updated 2021 Educators' Medicare Supplement information and a link to a recording of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska fall webinars will be available by the middle of December. To check out that information, go to the website at nsea.org/retired, and look for details under the 'Retirement & Insurance' tab.

— De Tonack,
NSEA-Retired President

Blomstedt Leads School Org

Schools, Districts Cited for Excellence, Wellness

Dr. Matthew L. Blomstedt, Nebraska Commissioner of Education, was elected president of the Council of Chief State School Officers at the 2020-21 Board of Directors meeting.

CCSSO is a nationwide, nonprofit organization comprised of members who lead departments of elementary and secondary education across the country. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major education issues.

Blomstedt will lead the nine-member CCSSO Board of Directors for the next year.

Blomstedt will complete seven years at the helm of the Nebraska Department of Education in January. In that role, he directs the promotion and improvement of education in Nebraska preK-12 schools.

He earned a Ph.D. in educational leadership and higher education, and a master's degree in community and regional planning from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Blomstedt and wife Angela are parents of five children in Nebraska public schools and university systems.



Blomstedt

Learn with NSEA

NSEA offers a broad range of professional development webinars featuring classroom topics requested by members. Those opportunities include Association workshops on topics such as bargaining, political action, member benefits, student loan forgiveness, advocacy and membership.

There is also an EdTech Webinar Series focused on distance learning tools available.

Find a full list of upcoming webinars at:
<https://www.nsea.org/webinars>

Life Insurance — At no Cost

Five NSEA members from across the state were selected by random drawing to receive \$100 gift cards from NEA Member Benefits. The drawing culminated the collection of names of members who had signed up for the NEA Complimentary Life Insurance that is part of membership at **no cost** to active, reserve and lifetime NEA members.

Recipients of gift cards were **Kyle Slusher**, Gretna Education Association; **Sherri Kelley**, Riverside Education Association; **Lisa Hansen**, Neligh-Oakdale Education Association; **Kelly Wiese**, South Sioux

City Education Association; **Denise Klaus**, Bennington Education Association.

Eligible members can take advantage of up to \$1,000 in term life through the program and:

- Up to \$5,000 in accidental death/disability coverage.

- Up to \$50,000 in accidental death insurance for covered accidents occurring on the job or while serving as an Association leader.

- Up to \$150,000 in accidental death benefits for eligible members who are victims of death by homicide while at work.

Sign up and register a beneficiary at:
neamb.com/teachers-insurance

Wanted: Praxis Tutors

Are you interested in becoming a virtual tutor to an Aspiring Educator (college student) member in math, reading or writing in order to help them pass the Praxis Core Assessment test required to earn entrance into colleges of education in Nebraska?

Through an NEA grant, NSEA will pay tutors, and will provide resources and materials. For details, contact NSEA Associate Tamra Mick at:

tamra.mick@nsea.org

Career Ed Teachers Cited

Three members have been recognized by the Association for Career and Technical Education for Nebraska.

Janet Stalder, a longtime NSEA member and business instructor at **Mid-Plains Community College Campus in McCook** was recognized as Teacher of the Year for Higher Education. Stalder serves as co-adviser of the local Phi Beta Lambda organization and was named to the National Phi Beta Lambda Adviser Wall of Fame in 2005.

Miranda Bright, a family and consumer sciences teacher at Crete High School and a member of the **Crete Education Association**, was named the ACTEN New Teacher of the Year. Her principal wrote that Bright “has the ability to break down tough concepts in a manner that even struggling learners can understand.”

Kathleen Kennedy, a family and consumer sciences teacher and NSEA member at **Central Valley High School in Greeley** was named ACTEN Member of the Year. She was recognized as a strong and longtime leader in family and consumer sciences education in Nebraska.

Grants Buys Books 250 Books

Lincoln Education Association member **Matt Macoubrie** and his sixth and seventh grade Park Middle School colleagues will be able to purchase more than 250 new class sets of books for reading teachers who

Rosenquist Joins NSEA Metro Efforts

NEA Organizer Eric Rosenquist has been assigned to assist NSEA's organizing work, with emphasis on assisting Omaha metro locals and providing guidance on year-round organizing. He began the Omaha-area assignment in November.

“Eric's assistance and experience will help grow our membership and our good work, both in the metro area and statewide,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

Rosenquist has worked for NEA for four years and has spent the last two years implementing organizing programs in Wisconsin. Those programs included executing issue-based campaigns, running member-organizer programs and working on electoral campaigns. Rosenquist lives in Madison, WI, with his wife and enjoys watching the Badgers compete against the Cornhuskers.



Rosenquist

struggle to have enough books for each student. The purchase is thanks to a \$2,000 grant from Family Dollar.

Macoubrie applied and colleagues helped build a list of needed books. Money will also help ELL teachers to buy appropriate reading level books for students. Remaining funds will update the school library with books the media specialist deemed necessary, and books kids enjoy but are not shelved at Park.

Colleges Begin Bargaining

The **State College Education Association (SCEA)** with campuses in **Chadron**, **Peru** and **Wayne**, has begun negotiations virtually with the State College Board of Trustees for the 2021-23 association years. Members of both the SCEA and the State Code Agency Teachers Association (SCATA), by statute, bargain two-year contracts.

SCATA members — teachers in the state's employment at sites like the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers in Kearney and Geneva and the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services in Tecumseh, Lincoln, and Hastings — also began bargaining with the State of Nebraska in early November.

The **Northeast Community College Education Association** negotiations team, led by **President Josh Schlote** and **Head Negotiator Matt McCarthy**, have begun bargaining work for members at Norfolk and other campuses.

Speaking of Education

“When you wish to instruct, be brief; that men’s minds take in quickly what you say, learn its lesson, and retain it faithfully. Every word that is unnecessary only pours over the side of a brimming mind.”

— Cicero,
Roman Philosopher, 106-43 B.C.

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

Oh, Baby — It's Getting Cold Outside!

In this Time of Pandemic, Many Children Aren't Properly Clothed for Winter's Cold

The ‘thank you’ letters from NSEA members are always moving. Letters from those who are assisted by NSEA’s Children’s Fund are even more so.

For instance, student council members from a mid-sized high school sent a note of thanks after the Children’s Fund answered a request for support of the school backpack supply program.

“The High School Student Council would like to thank you for supporting the Back 2 School Backpack Supply Project. We were able to provide supplies to over 200 students. This is made possible by your generous donation.”

The truly touching part of the letter was the set of 14 personal signatures from the members of the student council.

Such testimonials indicate the ability of the NSEA Children’s Fund to make a difference.

Every NSEA member knows of children in heartbreaking situations: children who wear thin jackets to school in cold weather because they have nothing else; students who get decent meals only when school is in session; students who can’t see the front of the classroom because they need eyeglasses. Or, in the case of the request



outlined in this letter, students in need of basic supplies with which to start the school year.

Teachers often use their own dollars to help in these situations, knowing they can’t possibly help every child. For that reason, NSEA created the Children’s Fund, and continues to work to raise money for that Fund.

Since 1994, donations to the Children’s Fund have provided hundreds of thousands of dollars to help children in need. In the past two years alone, the Children’s Fund has provided nearly \$100,000 in relief.

Contributions to the NSEA Children’s Fund come from teachers and businesses and fund-raisers across the state — and it’s important to note that every penny contributed goes to help children. NSEA picks up all the administrative expenses.

To receive funding to help a student, there is no red tape, no form for teachers to fill out. Simply contact the NSEA at 1-800-742-0047 and ask for Sally Bodtke. Or e-mail her at:

sally.bodtke@nsea.org

Donate to Children’s Fund

Would you or your local association like to contribute to the NSEA Children’s Fund? Your contribution is tax deductible. Send your check to the NSEA Children’s Fund, C/O NSEA, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508, or contact Sally Bodtke at 800-742-0047 or at:

sally.bodtke@nsea.org

Mental Health Visits Covered by BCBS Plan in 2021-22

Member Cost Share Will be Eliminated

Along with the announcement last month of the Educators Health Alliance 2021-22 school year premium rates for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE), was an important note regarding an enhancement for non-HSA PPO plans — a note that bears repeating with emphasis: Member cost sharing for visits to counselors and psychiatrists will be eliminated as of Sept. 1, 2021.

Sheri Jablonski, chair of the Educators Health Alliance Board of Directors that manages the BCBSNE health care plan used by most Nebraska school districts, explained further what that means: after Sept. 1, 2021, the plan will cover at 100 percent of office visits and costs for visits with counselors and psychiatrists

for individual, group, family and marriage counseling needs.

Jablonski, who is NSEA’s associate executive director and comptroller, said the enhancement will be of great benefit to members.

“Particularly as we begin to come out of this pandemic situation, it will be a real value to have these services covered by Blue Cross and Blue Shield,” she said.

The EHA is a non-profit corporation created to procure quality, affordable health care insurance for Nebraska education employees. The rates set by the EHA are for the BCBSNE plan used by more than 400 public school districts and affiliates in Nebraska. The plan is governed by a 12-member board representing the NSEA, the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.