

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • February 2021

CAVETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

MEMBERSHIP PAYS OFF

**Association Helps Correct
Paycheck Miscalculations**

**Harmful School
Funding Plans
in Legislature**

**Higher Ed Members
Share Thoughts
on COVID-19**

**Blue Cross, Blue
Shield to Cover
Vaccine Costs**



THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
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A Great Public School for Every Child.

NSEA Professional Development Covers Politics and Classroom, Loan Forgiveness, Technology

February, March Lineup Programs all Online

Ever wonder how and why politics affect your classroom? Local, state and national politicians have much to say about what happens inside your classroom, and you can learn why it is vital to stay attuned to political happenings in an online session with NSEA Director of Political Operations Brian Mikkelsen on Thursday, Feb. 4. Mikkelsen's online workshop, *How do Politics Affect Me and My Classroom?* will convene at 7:30 p.m. CST. To register, go to:

nsea.org/NewEdLearn

NSEA is fast becoming your best source for professional development. This list of opportunities over the next two months assists members in meeting classroom needs, personal care and education technology issues. Sessions are one hour, unless noted, and all times are central time. To learn more, and to register, go to:

www.nsea.org/webinars

Membership/Association Workshops

■ Thursday, Feb. 11, 5:30 p.m.: **Women and Money.**

■ Tuesday, Feb. 16, 5:30 p.m.: **NEA Member Benefits Overview** (travel focus).

■ Thursday, Feb. 18, 6 p.m.: **Student Loan Forgiveness/Reduction** (90 minutes).

■ Tuesday, March 16, 4:30 p.m.: **NEA Member Benefits Overview.**

■ Thursday, March 18, 5 p.m.: **Financial Essentials.**

■ Tuesday, April 13, 5:30 p.m.: **NEA Member Benefits Overview.**

■ Thursday, April 15, 5 p.m.: **Lifestage Investing.**

New Educator

Online Learning Opportunities

■ Thursday, Feb. 4, 7:30 p.m.: **How Do Politics Affect Me and My Classroom?** — Featuring NSEA's Brian Mikkelsen, learn how politics affect the classroom and hear the current status of legislation this session.

■ Tuesday, Feb. 23, 6 p.m.: **Planning for Uncertainty** — Collaborative decision-making processes and drawing on real-world situations, training will demonstrate how educators, counselors and leaders can build comprehensive action plans that attend to the wellness needs of both themselves and their students (90 minutes).

■ Thursday, Feb. 25, 6 p.m.: **Repeat of Planning for Uncertainty.**

EdTech Webinar Series

■ Wednesday, Feb. 10, 6 p.m.: **Using Videos in Your Lessons** — Videos are a great way to connect with your students. Learn how to create videos using QuickTime Player, Screencastify, and Loom and how to share them in Google Classroom and Seesaw. Explore ways to link videos that other people have created in your online space (90 minutes).

■ Wednesday, Feb. 17, 6 p.m.: **Using Pear Deck to Engage Learners at a Distance** — This session will discuss how to use Pear Deck to transform your PowerPoint/Google Slides into interactive presentations. Assess student understanding in real time or at their own pace by inserting questions and practice activities directly into your lesson (90 minutes).

■ Wednesday, Feb. 24, 6 p.m.: **Formative Assessments** — How popular EdTech tools can be leveraged to collect formative assessment and inform instruction in an asynchronous environment (90 minutes).

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

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

thevoice@nsea.org

On the Cover: Your Association support assisted Lincoln member Jennifer Ungvasky as she worked to resolve issues with her paycheck. Learn more beginning on Page 7.

Hindsight in 2020, Foresight for 2021



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“

The pandemic of 2020 delivered many cases of hindsight expertise: Should have, could have, would have. History was being made as the playbook was being written. NSEA locals and our members were vital in making pandemic related decisions in their school districts across the state.

”

As 2019 came to a close, I don't believe anyone saw the chaos of 2020 coming. Pandemic, economic uncertainty, political division – I think we all took it as it came and made decisions as best we could based on the information at hand at the time.

With the benefit of the information that comes with, appropriately, 20-20 hindsight, we can all see that in many cases we could have made better decisions. Such judgment comes easily when reflecting on past experiences and actions after the fact.

As we enter 2021, we stop to reflect on our experiences and those decisions made in 2020. We have learned a great deal and your insight is invaluable as we move forward.

Foresight in Treatment

Over the past couple of months, I have been evaluating quite a bit, both personally and professionally. I do not make decisions in isolation or autocratically. I carefully research, consult, discuss and survey others before making a shared decision. I listen to experts and weigh the options carefully. The information gathered with hindsight, knowledge and expertise then contributes to insight and foresight as we move forward.

My husband, Mike, has a major blockage in the basal artery leading to his brain which resulted in several ischemic strokes the week before Thanksgiving. The holidays took on a new meaning as we navigated our new challenges. Hindsight would suggest there were signs we didn't notice ahead of the strokes.

On Dec. 30, my brother, Jim, died unexpectedly. He was 59 and had battled health challenges for years. Grief is packed full of hindsight and memories.

If those challenges weren't enough, as I write this, Mike has been hospitalized for five days with a chronic infection. Hindsight regarding issues with his infection are all over the internet. Hindsight won't help, but foresight in treatment will.

The Most Important Voice

The pandemic of 2020 delivered many cases of hindsight expertise: should have, could have, would have. History was being made as the playbook was being written. NSEA locals and our members were vital in making pandemic-related decisions in their school districts across the state.

It was not much different from the influenza pandemic of 1918. As with the current pandemic, educators in 1918 gave vital service in that instance, as cited in the predecessor to *The Voice* magazine, *The Nebraska Teacher* (see box).

Teachers continue to give vital service today, and on their behalf, NSEA continues to advocate and represent as the legislature begins to hit full stride. There are already dozens of bills we know will affect our students, educators, schools and communities across Nebraska, and we are watching and working to influ-

Lessons from 1918

Influenza Service

(from the January 1919 edition of The Nebraska Teacher)

The war has produced heroes of the battlefield in unprecedented numbers. It has also discovered many thousands who have freely offered their lives and their services to the Red Cross and the YMCA and allied organizations.

The influenza epidemic which is reported to have taken a toll of 6,000,000 in three months has also produced its heroes. When the influenza reached this country, the trained nurses were nearly all in war service. But the call for help was imperative. School teachers everywhere responded almost unanimously where there was need, and their schools were closed. This service on the part of the teachers in this time of sore trial will never be forgotten.

It is futile to attempt to give personal credit, for every center had its nursing unit of teachers and other public-spirited women, of whom there were many; but the sick whose lives were saved by these volunteer nurses will not soon forget.

Many school boards have hesitated to pay teachers their salaries during the vacations when the schools were closed by order of boards of health. State Supt. W.H. Clemmons, however, has ruled that these salaries must be paid. The ruling is right and just. The teachers must not be left without funds to live on during such an emergency as this. And when the schools open again there must be teachers for them. In other words, the teachers must hold themselves in readiness to return to work at any time the school board may deem it safe to reopen the schools.

We are glad that Nebraska is not lagging behind the other states in a matter so vital to the schools.

ence each of them.

We know from experience your voice is the most important voice. We need you to help educate the public and our elected officials. You have the insight and foresight to make change happen.

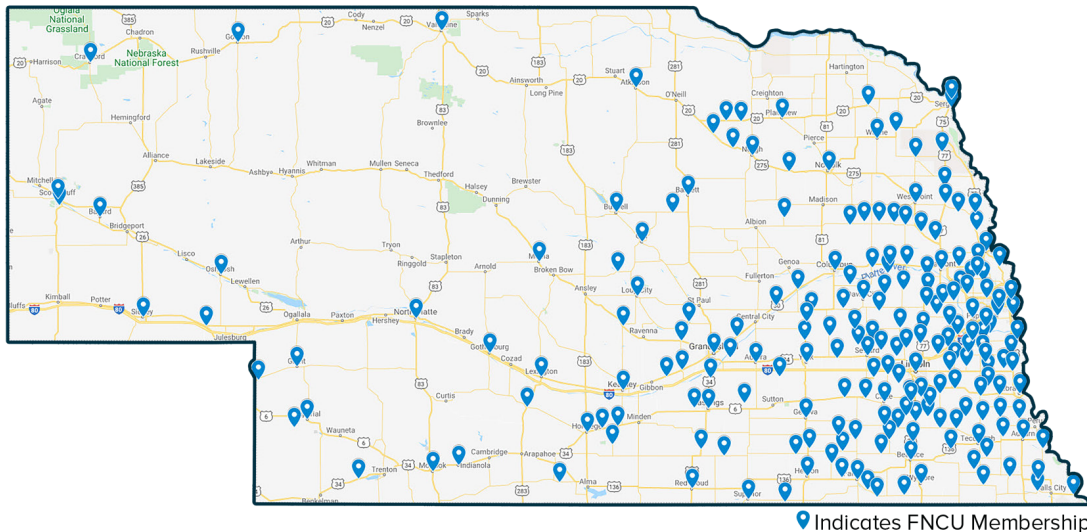
Find contact information for your senator by visiting NSEA's Action Center at nsea.org.

And with foresight, together, we can make 2021 a great year for public education!

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Blue Cross to Cover Cost of Vaccine in EHA Plan

Testing, Treatment also covered

With two COVID-19 vaccines now approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, members of the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) health insurance plan through Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will be able to get a vaccine at no cost.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska has waived member cost-sharing for in-network testing and treatment of COVID-19 through March 31 for plan members who present with symptoms or have been exposed to others who have tested positive for COVID-19. The company encourages members to use in-network providers, as they will not ask for up-front payment.

"Most Nebraska school districts are part of the EHA network, and use our Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska plan. This is a wonderful move by Blue Cross," NSEA President Jenni Benson said.

Members will pay nothing for medically appropriate in-network COVID-19 testing and treatment in a

doctor's office, urgent care facility or emergency room. It includes inpatient hospital stays related to the virus.

This waiver also applies to those who receive coverage through the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska Medicare Supplement and Medicare Advantage plans.

'Surveillance' Testing Not Covered

COVID-19 testing done for non-diagnostic purposes, such as public surveillance or employment, will not be covered because it is not considered medically appropriate. Surveillance testing is when an individual has no COVID-19 symptoms (is asymptomatic) and has no known exposure to COVID-19.

Cost shares for COVID-19-related telehealth visits returned to normal on Jan. 1. However, recent federal legislation allows high deductible health plans linked to an HSA to waive member cost shares for the following reasons, without tax penalty:

■ COVID-19 testing, including the office/urgent care/emergency room visit;

■ Telehealth (for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19-related services).

In addition, the legislation allows individuals to use HSA/FSA funds for the purchase of over-the-counter medical products without requiring a doctor's prescription.

The EHA is a non-profit corporation created to procure quality, affordable health insurance for Nebraska educational employees. The rates set by the EHA Board are for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plan used by more than 325 public school districts and affiliate groups in Nebraska.

The EHA plan evolved from a statewide health care plan NSEA founded in the 1960s. Today's 12-member board has six NSEA representatives and three each from the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators. NSEA Associate Executive Director and Comptroller Sheri Jablonski chairs the EHA board.

More than 80,000 Nebraskans are covered by the plan, making it the largest health plan in the state. Learn more at:

chaplan.org

Nebraska ESP Salaries Lag Those in Neighboring States

Across America, more than 2.7 million education support professionals (ESPs) work in the nation's public schools and colleges, with 77 percent employed at the K-12 level.

Paraeducators make up 32 percent of that number, and clerical workers add another 23 percent to that total.

Those are the numbers from the National Education Association's ESP Data Book: A Work Force Profile of Education Support Professionals, released in December. The numbers were culled from an in-depth review of the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, a nationwide sample survey that has been continuously collected since 2005. The Data Book provides a detailed look at the ESPs in America's public schools and post-secondary institutions.

Salaries for Nebraska's 14,872 full-time ESPs trail the national average.

"Like our teachers, our Education Support Professionals are underpaid when compared to their peers across the country," NSEA President Jenni Benson said.

The survey shows that when looking at earnings of the full-time ESP work force, Nebraska's ESPs rank 34th in average salary, at \$28,875. That figure stands behind Wyoming, (\$33,446, 17th), Colorado

2021 NEA Conference Offered at No Cost to ESPs

The 2021 NEA Education Support Professional National Conference will be virtual March 19-21, and free for 2,000 NEA ESPs to attend.

"This is the premier professional development opportunity for ESPs across the nation," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

The conference will offer up to 30 live and 15 on-demand professional learning opportunities over three days. Participants will have opportunities to network and share best practices and strategies with peers.

The conference is offered to NEA members only. Registration opens in February and will be free, but will be capped at 2,000 participants confirmed on a first come, first served basis. All workshop sessions will be 75 minutes in length and will be held in the afternoons on Saturday, March 20, and Sunday, March 21.

The conference will be followed by the NEA ESP of the Year celebration on Friday, March 26. Details may be found at:

www.nea.org/esconference

(\$31,085, 25th), Iowa (\$29,220, 31st) and Missouri (\$28,965, 33rd), but ahead of Kansas (\$26,451, 47th) and South Dakota (\$24,892, 51st).

The average salary for a full-time ESP in the U.S. is \$35,159.

Another 5,223 ESPs work part-time at their school jobs. Nebraska ESPs are well-educated, with 12.4 percent owning an associate degree and another 25.5 percent with a bachelor's degree, both numbers topping the national averages of 11.8

percent and 22 percent, respectively.

The largest group of ESPs in Nebraska are paraeducators (6,238), followed by clerical (4,421) and custodial (2,983) employees. The remainder are scattered among food service, security, transportation, technical and other job duties.

The average age of a Nebraska ESP is 44.9 years and 69.3 percent are female. Just more than 5 percent live below the poverty line.

Earnings data reflect 2019-20 averages.



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All Worth It: Lincoln Education Association and NSEA member Jennifer Ungvarsky didn't know where to turn when she received a paycheck for triple her salary. She called her association president, who helped resolve the problem quickly.

Membership Pays Off in Resolving Paycheck Issue

Association Steps In to Help Correct Two Miscalculated Payments for Lincoln Elementary Teacher

Her 30 years of Association membership paid off when NSEA member Jennifer Ungvarsky discovered her paycheck had been grossly miscalculated — twice.

At the start of 2020, Ungvarsky began participating in a high-deductible health savings plan to save for the future. Her goal was to save as much tax-free money as she could as quickly as she could. While she expected the HSA to grow in value, she didn't expect her February paycheck to triple.

"My paycheck ended up being

three times what it normally would be without putting anything into the HSA," said Ungvarsky, a third-grade teacher at Lincoln's Cavett Elementary School and a member of the Lincoln Education Association and NSEA.

The error threw off not only her bank account, but her withholding amounts for the HSA, taxes and FICA.

She knew she had to do something to correct the problem but wasn't sure where to start. The paycheck arrived on a Friday. She opened it on

Saturday and panicked because she hadn't checked it sooner. By the time she discovered the error the school district payroll office was closed.

"I didn't even know where to start or who to start calling," Ungvarsky said.

Association Takes Lead

She contacted the payroll department the following Monday, then called Rita Bennett, president of the Lincoln Education Association.

"She immediately got on it. She called them and sent emails,"

Ungvarsky said.

Bennett said she was trying to accurately document the errors in the messages.

Since Ungvarsky's hours as a teacher closely mirror the payroll department's hours, she was not able to receive their return calls or reach out to them during the school day. That's where Bennett stepped in to resolve the issue for her.

Ungvarsky wrote a check back to Lincoln Public Schools, then received her correct pay two weeks later.

All was well until April, when she received another incorrect paycheck, this time for several months' worth of pay.

"Rita...she is getting probably 5,000 calls a day...she jumped on it and she had it solved by that afternoon," Ungvarsky said. "I was so thankful. I never had to go to battle. I never had to make phone calls."

Ungvarsky said the miscalculations were nobody's fault. A computer glitch in LPS' new payroll system, which the district began using in September 2019, caused the disruptions.

"One thing we have continued to emphasize to members is the importance of examining their pay stub promptly and carefully every month," Bennett said.

Efforts Appreciated

Ungvarsky echoed Bennett's thoughts, and urged educators to review their paychecks on a regular basis to make sure all pay and withholding amounts are correct.

"If you don't see it, you don't know it," Ungvarsky said.

She appreciated Bennett's quick response and said having somebody else who knew who to call, who could do the footwork for her, saved so much time and trouble.

"She had the professionalism to deal with it. She had the know-how. She knew who to contact and what to say to get it going," Ungvarsky said.

Ungvarsky said maintaining her membership over the years was key to resolving the problem quickly.

"I've been an NSEA and LEA member, and in my 30th year teaching, I think I've used Association services once before. Having this taken care of was worth all 30 years of it."

Remember to Include These Items in Final Negotiated Agreement

End of bargaining season approaching

As bargaining draws to a close this winter and local associations and school boards move to ratify and approve next year's negotiated agreements, it's important to ensure that your signed agreement includes the following:

■ **Salary schedule:** While not always available when association members vote to ratify the 2021-22 agreement, a proposed salary schedule with updated base salary and any changes to indices or steps should be included when the board votes to approve the agreement. When both sides officially sign the agreement, that salary schedule should be included. Be sure to include the new salary schedule as an attachment to the signed agreement.

■ **Insurance coverage:** Many agreements contain a pasted version of the 21-22 premium/coverage table to supplement the specific language that details the terms of the benefit provided by the district. Regardless of whether the district covers a dollar amount or a percentage of the premiums, be thorough when proofreading this section of the agreement and watch for deductible amounts, premium amounts and terms

of the coverage.

■ **Extra-duty schedules:** Be sure to review extra duty schedules for any changes before signing. The extra-duty schedule is a binding part of the negotiated agreement and needs to be included with the entire signed document. When possible, include a reference within the agreement as you'll find in the NSEA Sample Negotiated Agreement language provided by your NSEA organizational specialist.

Perhaps the most overlooked portion of updating a new agreement is making changes to all effective dates. While date changes to the cover of the agreement, top of the salary and extra-duty schedules are fairly evident, the agreement may have other references to date-specific items such as deadlines for action or notifications. Failure to make those changes could pose significant problems when the binding nature of the agreement is called upon.

Questions about the ratification process, board approval or signing the agreement should be directed to your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

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Bills to Slash K-12 Revenue are Introduced

Constitutional Plan Would Limit Property Tax

Public education in Nebraska will face an assault on funding and local control in yet another session of the Nebraska Legislature.

In fact, there are two serious threats to the property tax revenue stream that — because of a dearth of state funding support — remains the primary source of revenue for Nebraska's K-12 schools.

As Gov. Pete Ricketts announced a week before Christmas, and then re-affirmed in his State of the State address Jan. 14, he wants lawmakers to impose harmful budget limits on Nebraska public schools and nearly all other local subdivisions.

The plan Ricketts backs, Legislative Resolution 22CA, seeks a constitutional amendment that would insert and lock an inflexible and impractical lid on property tax revenues into the state constitution. If the legislature approves LR22CA, the proposal would be on the November 2022 General Election ballot.

"Teachers, education support professionals, students, parents and others in the education family have struggled and persisted with great success in the face of a pandemic over the past year," NSEA President Jenni Benson said. "To throw yet another obstacle in the way of public education is beyond belief given all that education is dealing with at this time."

The NSEA and others in the state's public education community groups support local control of budgets and oppose such state-mandated limits. Nebraska public schools as a whole got 32.8 percent of funding from state sources, according to Census Bureau figures from fiscal year 2018. By comparison, Colorado, Iowa and Kansas received 41.2, 53.2 and 65.2 percent of funding from state sources in that year. Wyoming schools received 56.9 percent of funding from the state in 2018.

"Our school boards have budgeted conservatively and need the flexibility to react to unforeseen circumstances, including the worldwide pandemic and severe natural and man-made disasters, for example," Benson said.

Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, long a leader in the efforts to squash school funding resources, introduced LR22CA.

Also proposed: LB408, offered by Albion Sen. Tom Briese. LB408 calls for limitations similar to those proposed in LR22CA, and would put those limitations on all local governmental subdivisions in statute, rather than the state constitution. LB408 the "total amount of property tax revenue raised by a political subdivision in any fiscal year shall not be more than three percent greater than the amount raised in the prior fiscal year."

NSEA opposes both LR22CA and LB408.

NSEA Proposals on Remote Instruction, ESPs Pay Introduced

NSEA advocated for several bills to be introduced for

Former Teacher Walz Chairs Education Committee

Fremont Sen. Lynne Walz was elected chair of the Legislature's Education Committee on the opening day of the 107th Legislature's first session, Jan. 6. She defeated former chair Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte.

Walz, who previously served as vice chair of the committee, promised to bring her passion for teaching and learning to help resolve education-related issues and keep Nebraska schools strong.

"NSEA is pleased that Sen. Walz, a former classroom teacher, will lead the Education Committee," Jenni Benson, NSEA president said. "She has proven herself a dedicated advocate for children, public education and education professionals, and NSEA looks forward to working with her in her new role."

Walz was elected to the legislature in 2016 and won a second term in November. She taught fourth and fifth grades at Fremont Public Schools until Northside Elementary closed its doors, and then became a long-term substitute at Archbishop Bergan Elementary. She later transitioned to a career in real estate.

Walz will also serve as a member of the Health and Human Services Committee.

Other members of the Education Committee are Sen. Dave Murman, Glenvil; Sen. Adam Morfeld, Lincoln; Sen. Jen Day, Omaha; Sen. Rita Sanders, Bellevue; Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, Lincoln; Sen. Terrell McKinney, Omaha; Sen. Lou Ann Linehan, Elkhorn.



Walz

consideration this year. Among them:

LB64: Phases out the state tax on Social Security over a five-year period. Nebraska is one of just six states that taxes Social Security. The NSEA-Retired affiliate has been instrumental in the introduction of LB64. (Lindstrom)

LB518: Enacts changes under the Student Discipline Act. The bill addresses surreptitious recording of school activities by students. (Morfeld)

LB623: The Remote Instruction Act creates parameters for districts offering remote instruction. For details on the team of NSEA members that worked to shape this bill, turn to page 21. (Vargas)

LB640: Raises the state reimbursement for early childhood education programs from 60 to 80 percent. NSEA was involved in discussions on this proposal with other public education organizations. (Day)

LB641: A state statute enacted immediately following the flu pandemic of 1918 required the payment of teachers during the pandemic. LB641 would extend the same requirement to a school district's education support professionals. (Day)

"As part of the legislative process, individuals, as well as advocacy groups like NSEA, can ask for senators to introduce legislation," Benson said. "Senators found these worthy of review and consideration."

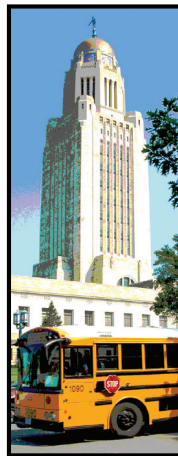
Support for Mental Health Programs, Relaxation of Retiree Substituting Regs

More than 600 bills were introduced this legislative session, and each will be given a public hearing before one of the legislature's committees. The NSEA has reviewed every bill and supports these education-related proposals:

LB5: Establishes a Purple Star Schools designation for schools that meet certain criteria in supporting military families within their schools. (Blood)

LB67: Allows school health centers to be a student's home medical or dental practice and allows operation outside of school hours. (Day)

LB87: Creates a mental health training program to include crisis management, referral training, recognition of signs/symptoms and de-escalation, funded by lottery Innovation Grants. (Morfeld)



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LB88: Protects free speech rights of student journalists and student media advisers. (Morfeld)

LB117: Adopts the Hunger-Free Schools Act, providing General Fund dollars to fund free breakfast and lunch for school districts that already participate in federally subsidized lunch and breakfast programs. (M. Cavanaugh)

LB132: Creates a School Financing Review Commission, listing member requirements and duties. (DeBoer)

LB135: Streamlines the structure of reimbursement for special education services and support services from the General Fund. (Wishart)

LB136: Addresses how repeat student offenders should be treated with regard to short-term suspension from school. (Vargas)

LB143: Requires notice be given to a school district regarding changes in child placement, specifically seven days before a newly enrolled student begins at the new school, or 24-hour notice in an emergency placement situation. (Kolterman)

LB146: Allows a retired teacher to substitute teach immediately, but for no more than 8 days in a calendar month, and defines intermittent service during the first 180 days following termination. Under current rules, teachers who retire are essentially barred from substituting for six months after retirement. (Kolterman)

LB154: Tracks school discipline by method and demographics, with a board to analyze and report discipline differences based on demographics. (Wayne)

LB198: Changes provisions of the Student Discipline Act, tightening the window principals have to provide written documents and adjusting steps for a hearing. Students shall be given an opportunity to make up work and will not be required to attend an alternate program. (Vargas)

LB247: Creates a task force of legislative committee chairs and state commission representatives to coordinate a statewide mental health hotline in conjunction with local and federal resources. (Pansing Brooks)

LB258: Adopts the Healthy and Safe Families and Workplaces Act, requiring employers to add “safe time” to paid sick leave provisions. “Safe time” is for absences because of domestic abuse, domestic assault, sexual assault or stalking, regardless of charge or conviction. (Vargas)

LB342: Provides \$2.5 million per year over the next two years from the General Fund to the Nebraska Department of Education for the Early Childhood Education Endowment Cash Fund, and \$2.5 million each year from the General Fund to state aid for the program. (Stinner)

LB359: Changes provisions regarding the authority of the State Board of Education in relation to multicultural education requirements. (Pansing Brooks)

LB361: Provides state aid to

NSEA Supports Broadband Proposals

NSEA members, impatient at the lack of broadband internet service in many areas of the state, voted at the April 2019 Delegate Assembly to create an ad hoc committee to study and push for broadband equity. By Jan. 22, five bills addressing broadband internet had been introduced in the Nebraska Legislature.

NSEA Capitol District President Burke Brown, District OR-I Education Association (Palymra-Bennett), said the bills are needed.

“These are a really good start. We want to make sure that this legislation gets us to where we need to be today, not where we should have been 10 years ago. It is critical that we ensure high-speed, affordable and reliable broadband is available to every public school student. Only then can we begin to shrink the homework gap,” said Brown, who chairs the ad hoc committee. NSEA supports each of these bills:

■ **LB388:** Adopts the Nebraska Broadband Bridge Act, granting up to \$20 million to install broadband in unserved and underserved areas. (Bostelman)

■ **LB398:** Raises basic broadband upload and download speeds and changes the Public Service Commission’s authority to include broadband affordability. (Bostelman)

■ **LB455:** Gives broadband providers access to utility poles at affordable costs. (Friesen)

■ **LB456:** The Nebraska Enhancing Broadband Act would facilitate and fund, with grants or loans, development of broadband networks in unserved and underserved areas. NSEA supports LB456 but will suggest amendments regarding speed of internet service. (Friesen)

■ **LB498:** Requires the Public Service Commission to develop a map showing broadband availability and speed across the state. (DeBoer)

Educational Service Units for core services (approximately \$12.5 million per year for two years) and technology infrastructure (approximately \$3 million per year for two years). (Dorn)

LB322: Adopts the School Safety and Security Reporting System Act to create a helpline for threats or possible harm to people or property. (Williams)

LB378: Requires the Commissioner of Education to report financial information related to expenditures, revenue and other categories including special education by Sept. 1 each year. (DeBoer)

LB396: Allocates \$100,000 for schools to purchase lunch items from local farmers through the Nebraska Farm to School Program Act. (Brandt)

LB426: Requires the Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a cost analysis for capital improvements and structural changes at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney by Dec. 15, 2021. (Health and Human Services Committee)

LB428: Entitles juveniles at youth rehabilitation and treatment centers to receive an appropriate educational equivalent to educational opportunities offered in public schools. (Health and Human Services Committee)

LB473: Creates a \$3 million fund under the Nebraska Department of Education to fund requests made by school districts facing extraordinary increases in their special education obligations. Unspent money shall be invested by the state. (DeBoer)

Association Opposes

Extracurricular,

Opportunity Scholarship Plans

NSEA opposes these bills:

LB210: Allows home-schooled

students to participate in a public school’s extracurricular activities with no course enrollment in that school. (Murman)

LB364: Adopts the Opportunity Scholarships Act and provides tax credits for people who contribute financially to a grade school requiring tuition, such as a private or parochial school. This is a rehash of LB1202, a “scholarship” scheme which was died in committee last year. (Linehan)

LB417: Authorizes off duty peace or law enforcement officers to possess a firearm on school grounds. (Halloran)

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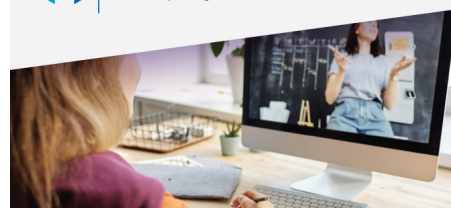
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Higher Education Replies Stretch Across Spectrum

Varied Opinions Given in COVID-19 Survey

Approaches to COVID-19 issues at Nebraska higher education institutions are widely varied at the start of this spring semester, causing a mixed bag of emotions for college instructors and staff as they prepare to endure a second spring in the midst of a pandemic.

Many NSEA higher education members who responded to an Association survey feel they don't have the support they need to be effective in their roles.

NSEA surveyed Association members at 19 Nebraska public higher education institutions in December to find out how they feel about working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Predominately, participants reported feeling stressed, overwhelmed and frustrated with administrators, though several indicated they felt more focused or happy with their institution's current situation.

"Administration has really impressed me in all of this," one member wrote. "They've been smart and very communicative in the process of their decision making, and they have consistently showed compassion to both staff and students as we all walk through this difficult time."

Many respondents expressed opposite feelings.

Not Meeting Needs

"No communication and no recognition of the additional workload makes me discouraged," wrote another.

The 169 respondents included professors and instructors of all ranks, support professionals and program directors who serve in a wide variety of roles, from associate degree and graduate studies to public information and healthcare services. The majority have worked in an education setting for 10 to 30 years.

Results showed 80 percent of



HIGHER EDUCATION AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

respondents' institutions were offering remote classes, either completely, synchronously with in-person classes or as a hybrid of online and face-to-face at different times.

Respondents aren't necessarily confident that their institutions' chosen models are working. Forty percent said their current learning model was not equitably meeting the needs of all students. Issues such as access to internet, illness, planning time, lack of technology in home offices and a feeling of disregard from higher-ups headlined those concerns.

An Assist from NSEA

As classes resumed last fall, NSEA Organizational Specialist Rich Wergin worked with members on nearly every public college and university campus in Nebraska as the members began a new semester teaching during the pandemic.

Wergin assisted members in efforts to reach satisfactory accommodations at the state college campuses at Wayne, Chadron and Peru, where in-classroom teaching was mandated.

Like their K-12 colleagues, many higher ed instructors were teaching synchronously, were working longer hours, and were spending much of that time and effort planning.

"When you combine the face-to-face with the synchronous instruction, providing make-up work for those with Wi-Fi issues or being too ill to join online, the task seemed overwhelming," Wergin said. "Our higher ed members learned very quickly that this year would be like no other."

Higher Ed Members Feel 'Disconnected,' 'Very Tired'

Prevention and Safety

Since every institution of higher education approached teaching in the pandemic differently, instructors and staff are not on a level playing field. Some have been required to go virtual, and others were told they must be on campus.

"I feel like my health and safety are not valued by my institution," one respondent to NSEA's survey of higher education members wrote. "I believe the chancellor and board's insistence on in-person teaching has put me and my family at risk."

Others were given the freedom to make their own choice.

"Sometimes, I feel like a person who is disconnected from others and invisible in life because I have chosen to go remote now instead of having face-to-face classes," wrote another. "However, I worry about getting out and being physically present because of COVID-19."

Some feel they are being left in the dark when it comes to the details of COVID-19 spread on their campuses.

"The school provides overall infection rates but does not relate to us if we have been in close proximity to infected students or personnel," one replied.

When it comes to preventing the spread of COVID-19 on campuses:

- 92 percent said all students and staff should be mandated to wear masks.

- 95 percent said their students are required to mask, but only 89 percent said staff are required to mask.

- 75 percent said their institutions have provided enough personal protective equipment (masks, sanitizers, shields, etc.) for staff, though some said their institutions have not provided any at all, largely because they are working remotely.

- On a 1 (unsafe) to 5 (safe) scale, 66 percent rated their feeling of safety relative to COVID-19 while on their campus at a 3 or 4.

Communication

Several participants said they aren't getting clear, consistent communication from their institution's administration.

HIGHER ED SURVEY RESULTS

REMOTE CLASSES & EQUITY CONCERNS

80%  **40%**

offered remote or hybrid classes during fall semester

replied current learning model was not meeting students' needs

PREVENTING COVID-19

92%  **40%**

believe all students and staff should be required to wear masks

think their institutions have provided enough PPE

COMMUNICATION

47%  **54%**

responded their institution was not listening to educator input

felt respected and valued by their institution

WORKLOAD

57%  **64%**

felt their employer was not concerned about their mental welfare

are working up to 15 hours more per week than they did before COVID-19

Policies related to COVID-19 are changing rapidly, and they feel they are being left behind.

“(Administrators) have not been open with us about the number of students/employees who have had positive COVID tests, and they are not seeking faculty input,” one respondent wrote.

Survey results showed:

■ 47 percent said they felt their institution was not listening to educator input related to COVID-19.

■ 43 percent said their institution was not communicating effectively with educators and staff about COVID-19 updates and plan adjustments.

■ Only 54 percent said they felt respected and valued by their institution.

Workload

Instructors and staff surveyed overwhelmingly expressed concerns about increases in workload and worries about mental health—for their students,

for their colleagues and for themselves.

“We need more mental health resources available for K-12 teachers and college instructors,” one participant wrote. “I know that many of my colleagues are really struggling emotionally and are experiencing significant burnout, although they would never admit it in a department meeting or to administration. We’re all just trying to hang on right now.”

Many commented on the unsustainability of their current workload, planning classes both in-person and virtually for some.

“Being tied to my computer is very uninspiring. Balancing computer/work time with personal time and the expectations of those who are emailing you is hard,” another wrote.

“My institution has encouraged faculty to office from home. This has increased faculty disengagement. Many shared program responsibilities are falling on program leadership and a

few faculty while others are doing only their teaching responsibilities,” one respondent wrote.

Regarding mental health and employee workload:

■ 57 percent felt their employer was not concerned about their mental welfare.

■ 23 percent said they have sought help from a mental health or medical professional because of increased work stress since the pandemic began.

■ 64 percent reported working more than they did before COVID-19, with the majority of those working 4 to 9 additional hours per week, and some tacking on an extra 15 hours or more per week.

■ Still, 82 percent said they have no plans to leave the education profession in the next five years.

One participant summed up the situation in just a few words:

“I am very tired.”

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No More Lids on Kids!

Ricketts' Lid Plan Draws Immediate and Broad Opposition

The response to Gov. Pete Ricketts' call to further squeeze funding sources for Nebraska public schools was quick and sure.

The alarm was sounded by newspaper editorial writers, in letters to the editor and by community columnists, among others.



Gudgel

The student representative on the Grand Island Board of Education, Kendall Bartling, spoke out in a long letter to his hometown newspaper, the Grand Island Independent.

Omaha North High Magnet School English teacher Mark Gudgel wrote that in light of the pandemic, he was "dumbfounded" that Ricketts chose this time to "openly declare war on public schools."

Newspapers across the state, including the Lincoln Journal Star and the Omaha World-Herald also supported the idea of the state shouldering more of the burden.

Ricketts announced just before Christmas that his goal in 2021 is to further cut funding for schools, and that plan is ensconced in Legislative Resolution 22 CA. If passed by the Legislature, the plan would go before voters in November 2022 as a proposed amendment to the state Constitution. Once in the Constitution, it would be incredibly difficult to alter or overturn (see page 9 for more details).

NSEA President Jenni Benson applauded the immediate response by the state's public education community.

"It's a new year, and we must rally once again and work to make clear to lawmakers that the best way to provide instant property tax relief is to provide more state aid to public education," Benson said.

A Teacher's Perspective

Gudgel, a 17-year English teacher and a candidate for Omaha mayor, wrote an opinion blasting Ricketts for threatening further

Spending Limits Already in Place

When discussing the property tax issue, Nebraskans should know these facts:

- Nebraska ranks 48th in the nation in state aid to K-12 schools. Additional state monies to K-12 schools would lower property tax rates.

- Nebraska school districts are currently the only governmental subdivision in the state with both a spending limit (2.5 percent) and a property tax limit (\$1.05 per \$100 of valuation).

- Deeper spending limits, while facing near-unanimous opposition from the state's K-12 public education family, were removed from the LB1107 property tax relief bill before it passed last year.

- The state's tax revenues in December were 7.9 percent above projections.

upset at an already uncertain point in time for public schools.

"Few occurrences in history have more emphatically punctuated the value of public schools than the COVID-19 pandemic," Gudgel wrote. "In many ways 2020 confirmed for all what some already knew, namely that schools aren't just a place for gaining knowledge about the world. Schools are also where many young people go for much-needed support, for food, to improve their mental and physical health, to make friends and maintain relationships, and so much more. In short, schools are perhaps the single most critical part of the infrastructure of our society."

Gudgel led with the idea that teachers are "the glue that binds society," noting that teachers have a hand in forming parents, productive citizens and careers.

Contact Your Lawmaker!

Make your voice heard in opposition to LR22CA and lids on kids. Contact your state lawmakers here:

- **Office of Gov. Pete Ricketts**

P.O. Box 94848

Lincoln, NE 68509-4848

Phone: 402-471-2244

Email: governor.nebraska.gov/contact-form

- **Find Your Senator**

nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_find.php

"Without us, there are no plumbers, no chemists, no chefs, no electricians, no doctors, no lawyers, no teachers and no nurses. If we stop doing this job, Atlas will shrug, society will shatter, and all that we hold dear will cease to be," Gudgel wrote.

Shutting down schools last spring quickly showed their impact on the economy—parents had to stay home from work to care for their children, which meant no workforce. Businesses closed and people lost their jobs.

"If there was ever any doubt that public schools are a singularly important institution in American society, 2020 surely laid that doubt to rest," he wrote. "With all of this in mind, I am dumbfounded that Gov. Ricketts, whose mismanagement of the pandemic has put Nebraska in a worse position than most states, has decided that 2021 is the year in which he will openly declare war on public schools."

Nebraska already ranks 48th in state aid to public schools, and any further lids on spending will only cause more damage to the already uncertain futures of students.

"As we transition into 2021, we must remember that any attack on our public schools is an attack upon the children, and the society, which are dependent upon them," Gudgel wrote.

Gudgel called on parents, teachers, administrators and students to contact their senator and the governor to oppose LR22CA.

A Student's Stance

Bartling's opinion was published shortly after Ricketts announced his plan.

"This comes in the midst of an unprecedented pandemic, one that has stretched school resources to their limits, staff members past the edge and students into never before seen emotional and educational issues. Yet, Gov. Ricketts thinks spending limits are appropriate," Bartling wrote. "The simplest argument against such an overreach was best echoed

by Sen. Adam Morfeld in a tweet: 'We already have spending limits on schools — it's called the local school board.'

"Gov. Ricketts has a track record of being anti-public schools. ...Nebraskans realize the benefit that strong, well-funded public education brings to our state — bright minds, bright futures. There is no real reason, save for crippling the public school system in the state of Nebraska, to enforce spending limits."

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Dintersmith to Address Delegate Assembly

The keynote address for the 2021 NSEA Delegate Assembly will highlight what author Ted Dintersmith has learned in conversations with thousands of educators across the country about what school could be.

Dintersmith has produced films, keynotes and now a book that focus on the urgency of reimagining school to keep pace with the innovation that is reshaping society.

In 2012, Dintersmith was appointed by President Obama to represent the U.S. at the United Nations General Assembly. In 2018, he received the prestigious NEA Friend of Education Award.

The April 23-24 Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Any member in good standing can seek election to attend and participate in Delegate Assembly, which includes Dintersmith's address and professional development on Friday night and Saturday's day of action.

On Saturday, April 24, delegates will consider proposed



Dintersmith

changes to Association Bylaws and Resolutions and approve dues for the 2021-22 Association year. They will also vote on an Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee representative and a Higher Education Academy Committee representative on the NSEA board.

Any candidate for the EMAC or HEAC positions who wishes to have campaign material included in the electronic materials available to all delegates in advance of Delegate Assembly must submit that request to NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell not less than 45 days prior to April 23. The deadline for that action is 11:59 p.m. CST on Tuesday, March 9. Contact Fennell at:

maddie.fennell@nsea.org

A handful of awards honoring members and those who have contributed to the betterment of public education will be presented.

The 2021 event will be NSEA's 160th Assembly since the Association's founding in 1867.

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. Learn more at:

nsea.org/delegateassembly

Cartoonist Fell Honored with Champion of Education Award

Cartoonist Paul Fell accepts the NSEA's Champion of Education Award from NSEA President Jenni Benson in January. The honor was announced at the 2020 Delegate Assembly. Because the event was virtual, Fell stopped by the NSEA office to meet with Benson last month. Fell studied art at Peru State College, served as a high school art teacher and coach, and was a college art professor. His editorial cartoons are now familiar to Nebraskans. Though Fell has teased and skewered politicians on both sides of the aisle and on both sides of every issue, he has remained steadfast in his support of one institution: public education. His cartoons have appeared in Nebraska newspapers over the past 40 years.



Honor a Co-worker at 2021 Delegate Assembly

New this year: members will recognize an outstanding administrator at NSEA's Delegate Assembly. The Administrator of Excellence Award will honor an administrator who works every day for the success of students and staff. Nominations should focus on the honoree's effort to advocate for public education, willingness to seek input from educators, and support of NSEA.

For other honors, any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or group for recognition. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 12, 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 prize:

- **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 for excellence.

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.

- **Administrator of Excellence:** Honors an administrator for support of public education and NSEA.

- **Media:** Cites a newspaper, television or radio outlet for coverage/promotion of public education.

Words Matter More Than We Think

NDE Promotes Educator Effectiveness Through SEED Program

One of a series of invited articles
by Nebraska Department of Education
staff and partners

Words matter. The intentional communication of words may never be more important than it is today.

The power of these words lies within the intentional communication behind them. The revised Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards are intentional in outlining the expectations of all educators in Nebraska. With this intent comes needed support.

Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development

The Nebraska Department of Education's Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development (SEED) team is committed to a system of support and development, aligned with effective evaluation practices, that relies on an ongoing process of checks and balances. Because words matter, all parties must be engaged and all voices must be heard, which subsequently requires an environment where curiosities lead to questions and growth can happen over time.

The word evaluation was intentionally left out of the acronym SEED. Why? Because words matter. Support and development is an ongoing process that requires collaboration and purposeful reflection. Evaluation is only one part of this process and can be counterproductive if used as a stand-alone indicator of one's abilities.

Words matter. Great educators know vocabulary instruction is a strategy to support learning in all content areas.

The Nebraska Department of Education and its educational partners recognize the importance of utilizing this same strategy of vocabulary instruction to lead educators in conversations surrounding the NTPPS. Why? Because words matter. The NTPPS demonstrate the commitment to an expectation of equitable and data-driven practices for Nebraska's teachers and principals.

The NTPPS intentionally communicate this commitment through these powerful words: "Confront and eliminate institutional bias and student marginalization." Confront is a strong word with many definitions. This is what the Collins Dictionary says:

Con'front /kən'frənt/ verb

- to face in hostility or defiance; oppose
- to present for acknowledgment, contradiction, etc.; set face to face
- to stand or come in front of; stand or meet facing
- to be in one's way
- **to bring together for examination or comparison** (emphasis added).

The NTPPS's approach to the word "confront" is a call to action for educators to ask better questions. To prepare for this work in organizations, with colleagues and in schools, the work must start with the individual.

Questions regarding our own awareness, blind spots and biases are the starting point for personal reflection. Only after we confront our personal awareness can we

begin the work to inquire about policies, practices and characteristics within organizations that may hinder the opportunities of students or serve to exclude certain groups of people.

Why Come Together?

Words matter. As education moves into the post-COVID era of schooling, why does Nebraska's educational community need to come together as a group of individuals to impact the whole? Two words: morally compelled.

Educators and all members of Nebraska's educational system are morally compelled to have intentional conversations about the fact that schooling has barriers, including benefits for some while creating biases toward others.

The NTPPS is intentional about elevating conversations around equity and data-driven practice to a frequent, regular, reflective space. The Leadership Academy of New York offers these suggestions to help educators reflect:

- Confronting behavior that openly or covertly promotes inequity, color blindness and deficit-thinking;
- Regularly examining district data for signs of inequity with the district leadership team;
- Purposefully building the capacity of others to examine their own assumptions, beliefs and personal biases;
- Establishing high expectations (performance and behavioral) for adults and students in our school(s), regardless of identity or background; and
- Regularly engaging in conversations with stakeholders about racial equity and access, even in the face of risk and push back.

The NDE and its partners are committed to leading and supporting all Nebraskans in learning, earning and living. The NTPPS demonstrate necessary shifts toward consistency in expectations. As Nebraska learns from the silver linings of pandemic change, these standards serve as an anchor of excellence and a direction for COVID-19 and post-COVID-19 instruction and school leadership.

(Leadership Academy information used from www.leadershipacademy.org)

A link to the NTPPS can be found at:

education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness

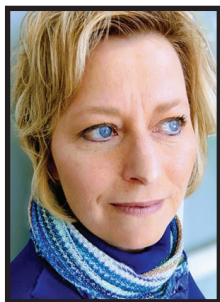
As director of Statewide Teacher and Principal Support, Dr. Kim Snyder works closely with Educational Service Units, institutes of Higher Education, and other educational partners, as well as with districts themselves, to provide statewide systems of support and development that ensure equitable access 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. Kim Snyder,
Director,
NDE Statewide
Teacher and
Principal Support**



**Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist**



**Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
Network
Specialist**



Teachers on Television

Watch your local radio, television and newspaper outlets for a new NEA outreach effort that kicks off on Monday, Feb. 8, highlighting and building public awareness and support for teachers, school staff and Nebraska public schools. The campaign, funded through an NEA Advertising Assistance Grant, features teachers, parents and students sharing stories of how they connected and supported learning during the pandemic. NEA worked with the Columbus, Fremont and Westside school districts to safely record the new ads. The members share stories that demonstrate teachers' commitment to their students. Pictured above are Daniel Moran, a dual language teacher at Fremont, and Sara Rodwell, a third grade teacher at Westside District 66.

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neamb.com/marketplace

NEA Member Benefits: Always Here to Help

Members seeking to keep those New Year's resolutions alive can get health and wellness tips for educator/members at:

neamb.com/family-and-wellness

In addition, if you currently participate in member benefits programs and have been affected by the coronavirus, you may be able to get assistance with your bills. Call 1-800-637-4636 or email ask-us@neamb.com with questions about NEA Member Benefits products or services.

Help is available Monday-Friday, 9

a.m. to 5 p.m. EST, and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. EST.

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- ◆ Mathematics (elementary and secondary)
- ◆ Physical Education (elementary and secondary)
- ◆ Reading Specialist (PK-12)
- ◆ Science (elementary and secondary)*
- ◆ Social Science (elementary and secondary)
- ◆ Special Education (K-12)
- ◆ Special Education – Early Childhood
- ◆ Special Education (Birth-Kindergarten)

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Spectrum Photo, Gering, NE

Keri Homan

Principal at Morrill Elementary School
Master of Arts in Educational Administration



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CSC has also designated an individual to coordinate the college's efforts to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Inquiries regarding Title IX may be directed to: Ted Tewahade, Title IX Coordinator, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St. Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-430-0980, Email: titleixcoordinator@csc.edu.

Teachers Affecting Policy



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“

*Even the best
of intentions
can go awry
when policy
development
is devoid
of the
practitioner
perspective.*

”

If you’ve read this column before, you know that one of my favorite phrases is “If you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu!” as I speak of the importance of teacher voice in decision making.

This fall and over the winter break I had the privilege of seeing two different groups of NSEA members exercise their teacher voice, affecting policy development for teachers across the state.

Conversations with the Commissioner

Last spring, we were working closely with Commissioner of Education Matt Blomstedt on COVID-19-related events. He mentioned that he was meeting regularly with administrators across the state to discuss the rapidly changing COVID-19 landscape. NSEA President Jenni Benson asked him to also meet with teachers across the state; she knew that it was important for classroom practitioners to be able to share directly with the commissioner and his staff the impact of COVID-19 on their classrooms, colleagues and students.

Teachers across the state submitted their names for consideration. The commissioner selected 15 NSEA members from Chadron to Omaha and met with them regularly this fall, inviting his staff to also participate and learn directly from practitioners. Questions were posed to the group and they were divided into small groups to discuss their perspectives.

One of the positive outcomes of these conversations was reported in October – the commissioner announced that school districts could reduce their instructional hours up to 12 hours per quarter (48 hours this school year) and devote that time to professional learning, staff work time, or to connect with parents. Learn more about Blomstedt’s guidance at:

<http://bit.ly/ndeguide2021>

While this group grew from the 2020 COVID -19 crisis, we have encouraged Blomstedt to continue this “kitchen cabinet” to be able to hear regularly and directly from educators about how policy from NDE can positively affect our kids and classrooms.

LB623: The Remote Instruction Act

Meg Mandy, legislative aide to Sen. Tony Vargas, contacted NSEA in November and asked for NSEA input on legislation Vargas wanted to develop regarding remote learning. As the use of remote learning becomes more prevalent across Nebraska for a multitude of reasons, key concerns have risen about ensuring equitable education for all students engaged in remote learning, whether that is by choice or because of district action.

In December, NSEA staff met with Mandy and Elizabeth Eynon-Kokrda and Scott Packer from the Education Rights Counsel, a non-profit organization dedicated to education equity. As we listened to the ideas being discussed, it became evident that we needed the voices of those who were actually teaching

during the pandemic to bring their crucial perspective to the table. Jenni turned to her mental Rolodex of contacts (we often joke that she is just two degrees of separation from every Nebraskan) and compiled a group of educators to work on the development of this policy.

By the end of December, a dozen NSEA members met for about five hours with Eynon-Kokrda, Packer and Mandy regarding their remote learning experiences. The knowledge and expertise of these members contributed to the creation of a framework for remote learning legislation that would ensure that regardless of location (urban, suburban, rural), core standards related to areas such as instructional pedagogy, consistent access and hours of actual instruction would be followed so that any student engaged in remote learning is offered the same high quality education offered in the in-person environment. The group also made it clear that when leveraging the benefits of remote instruction, we do not simply attempt to re-create the classroom environment in a remote setting.

They began by discussing what constitutes various modalities of learning including in-person learning, virtual learning, distance learning and remote learning. The group then deliberated in small groups on a series of questions that explored access, finding, technology, broadband internet, instructional strategies, professional development, funding, synchronous and asynchronous instruction, mandated subjects of bargaining and more. At the end of the day Sen. Vargas joined the group to listen and explore some of these points.

On Jan. 20, Vargas introduced LB623, the Remote Instruction Act. It’s comforting to know that teachers were treated as the experts in the development of this piece of legislation.

Now It’s Your Turn

In the Nebraska Unicameral it is often said that the second house is the people and their voices are heard through the committee process. Every bill introduced must have an open hearing with open public testimony. Hearings have run from a matter of minutes with few testifiers to many hours with scores of testifiers.

With COVID-19, this legislative session will be unique. Whatever the final look of the new hearing processes, it is **crucial** that teacher voices are heard. We will ask you, just as we asked those educators noted above, to lend your experience and knowledge to pass legislation that will make schools stronger or to stop bills that will harm public schools.

We will ask you to make calls, write letters and perhaps even meet with senators so that they understand how the legislation will impact YOUR students and classroom. Even the best of intentions can go awry when policy development is devoid of the practitioner perspective.

Take a Zoo Tour at 2021 Conference

NSEA-Retired will take its spring conference virtual in 2021. Because of COVID-19 and gathering restrictions, the April 22 conference will be held online—but that won't halt opportunities to connect and learn.

The morning session will include a behind-the-scenes tour of the Lincoln Children's Zoo, presented by Zoo President and CEO John Chapo.

Attendees will then hear from the Lincoln Yoga Center about the TAKE 5 program, addressing the need for a holistic approach to childhood mental wellness in schools and giving students an effective way to quell inner turmoil in just five minutes.

Breakout rooms and a short session about I Love Public Schools' recent work will round out the conference.

Registration details for the conference will be available online beginning in March. To register, go to:

nsea.org/retired

Elections coming up: File soon

Elections are coming up quickly for leadership roles within the NSEA-Retired organization. Those seeking office may file for election until Friday, Feb. 12. To file, select 'Elections' at nsea.org/retired.

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

Retired members also will elect delegates to the April 23-24 NSEA Delegate Assembly. Elected will be four delegates



**Re-Elect
Margie Nowak**
to the
NSEA-R Board,
Capitol District

Retired Teachers Honored by Endowment

Grand Island Northwest High School seniors soon will be recognized for their efforts beyond academics, thanks to a new award named in honor of two longtime educators and NSEA/NEA-Retired members.

The Northeast Education Foundation recently approached James and Martha McGahan, who taught at Northwest, with a desire to create an endowment in their honor.

"You cannot talk to a Northwest graduate who graduated before 2000 and not have the McGahans come up in the conversation," Foundation Executive Director Gian Baxter-Collins said. "They are a staple to the high school. They both were at Northwest for so long, and every student was touched by one or both of them."

Martha McGahan offered heartfelt appreciation toward the foundation. She said she and her husband both felt students should be recognized for their citizenship and what they do for others, rather than just their academics.

"These students would have the chance to earn an award on their own merits and not their academic performance," she said. "Our sense is that it is not just the scholars who ought to be recognized for what they do for the school. There are people at all levels who come to school, are proud of the school, are nice kids who do things for other people and care about other people. They are just good citizens."

"In order to receive the award," James McGahan said, "a Northwest student must be nominated by a Northwest staff member. This ensures that the student truly is deserving of the award."



Photo courtesy Grand Island Independent/theindependent.com

In Their Honor: The Grand Island Northwest Education Foundation will give a new scholarship award in honor of longtime educators James and Martha McGahan.

Have you started a new adventure or hobby? Share details with us by sending your story to NSEA-Retired President Dr. De Tonack at:

dtonack@neb.rr.com

from the Capitol District; five delegates from the Metro District; three each from the Tri-Valley and Elkhorn districts; one each from the Panhandle and Sandhills districts; and two at-large delegates.

The NEA Representative Assembly delegate allocation now has one delegate from the Metro and Capitol districts combined; one delegate from the Elkhorn, Sandhills, Tri-Valley and Panhandle districts and out-of-state combined; and three at-large delegates.

Candidates for RA delegates and NSEA-Retired board delegates must submit a 50-word biography.

Governance/Lobby Day Goes Virtual

The 2021 NSEA-Retired's Governance/Lobby Day will be virtual, from 10 a.m. to noon on Monday, Feb. 22.

It will include opportunities to visit with state senators, get a legislative update and get assistance contacting senators. Members who register will receive the Zoom link.

After the event, participants will be

asked to email, phone or write their senators. Select the 'Calendar, Events & Registration' link at:

nsea.org/retired

Discount for new members

To show appreciation for all teachers have done, NSEA-Retired is offering a \$75 rebate on the NSEA Pre-Retired/Retired Lifetime memberships for new members joining by June 1.

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 may be available. Once you join as a new member, you will receive a \$75 rebate from the NSEA-Retired dues. For more details, contact NSEA's Rebecca Smith at rebecca.smith@nsea.org.

— De Tonack,
NSEA-Retired President

NPERS Board Elects Elliot to Another Term

Omaha Central Educator to Chair Retirement Board for a Second Time

The Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems Board of Directors in January re-elected Janis Elliott to a second term as chair of the board.



Elliott

Elliott, chair of the science department at Omaha Central High School, is a former member of the NSEA Board of Directors, and is in her second five-year term on the board, which expires in 2024. Board members are appointed by the governor.

Elected vice chair of the board was Kelli Ackerman, director of accounting and payroll for the Lincoln Public Schools. Ackerman is also in her second five-year term on the board.

Elliott was also recently elected to serve as the secretary-treasurer of the National Council on Teacher Retirement. The NCTR is an independent organization dedicated to safeguarding the integrity of public retirement systems for teachers.

The Public Employees Retirement Board was created in 1971 to administer Nebraska retirement plans for school employees, state employees, judges and the State Patrol. The board assumed administration of the retirement system for Nebraska county employees in 1973.

NEA Grant to Fund Issue Organizer Position

More of your NEA dues dollars have been returned to Nebraska. NSEA received a grant of \$119,306 from the NEA Center for Organizing to fund an 11-month Temporary Member Issue Organizer.

The person hired for the position will lead organizing efforts, especially as those efforts relate to member concerns, working with members in locals across the state. Such organizing has been extremely effective in the past. As an example, in early 2016, early childhood educators in Omaha were bogged down with excessive assessment requirements that forced hours of computer keyboard time and led to a lack of effective plan time.

The Omaha Education Association organized the teachers, dialogued with Omaha administrators, and eventually had a face-to-face discussion with the Nebraska Commissioner of Education. Both OPS and the state cut back on the required number of assessments, benefitting teachers and students statewide.

The work of the organizer will focus on conducting one-on-one conversations that lead to the identification of issues that can be addressed through member organizing. Additionally, the grant will focus on providing affiliate leadership development, training local associations in organizing best practices and member engagement.

Aspiring Educators will Focus on Delegate Assembly

Because of the constraints of the pandemic, the **Aspiring Educators Board of Directors** has decided to forego a spring conference this year, and focus on the organization's annual Delegate Assembly, typically held with the conference. The

Leadership Openings Available; Filing Deadline is Approaching

Starting Friday, Feb. 19, NSEA members will vote for candidates to fill nearly three dozen district leadership posts, including openings on the NSEA's Board of Directors and openings on NSEA's six regional governance districts. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future. But first, those candidates must file for election.

The filing window opened Jan. 1 and closes Tuesday, Feb. 7. Voting takes place online, and will begin at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 19. It will close at midnight on Sunday, March 14.

To view the vacancies, or to file, go to the NSEA website and click on the '2021 District Elections' link. Select your district, and then select the office of interest. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. That number can be found above your name on the mailing label of The Voice. Call NSEA for details 1-800-742-0047. The website is at:

www.nsea.org/your-leadership-needed

Assembly will be a virtual affair, with delegates conducting business, setting dues and electing delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly, set for April 23-24.

The Aspiring Educators Delegate Assembly is Saturday, March 27. Members of Aspiring Educators who would like to serve as a delegate should contact their local chapter leadership team or advisor.

Children's Fund Bolstered by Papillion-Lavista Denim Day Drive

Members of the **Papillion-LaVista Education Association** raised \$2,261 for the NSEA Children's Fund during a first semester Denim Day fundraiser. The gift was delivered to NSEA in early January.

For the past few years, the PLEA has hosted a Denim Day in support of the Children's Fund. Participating staff donated at least \$5 and in return were able to wear jeans on a pre-set date.

PLEA Communications Director Andrew Nabity said the fall event was successful, despite pandemic-caused challenges. One of the biggest obstacles, he said, was making district staff aware of the event. Nabity said the PLEA building representatives helped resolve that issue and make the drive a success, along with the association's social media posts.

"We were not able to have a big kick-off event as we had anticipated, so this communication was vital to the success of the philanthropy. Thankfully, our BRs are amazing and took this challenge and ran with it," Nabity said.

It was also helpful that the association gained permission to send materials through the district's inter-school mail system. "That eliminated any possible problems with the distribution or collection of supplies and money," he said.

Nabity has coordinated the PLEA's philanthropy in recent years. "I am proud of the work that PLEA has done to support the students, staff and stakeholders in our district and around the state," he said.

PLEA has already set another Denim Day for Wednesday, March 3. The goal is to raise \$5,000 this school year.



Nabity

Speaking of Education

"There's no word in the language I revere more than 'teacher.' None. My heart sings when a student refers to me as his teacher, and it always has. I've honored myself and the entire family of man by becoming a teacher."

— *Pat Conroy*
American author, 1945-2016

Children's Fund Benefits Students

NSEA members recognize that many students in our schools are struggling. Some live without basics like food, clothing and shelter.

The NSEA established the Children's Fund in 1994 to fulfill the immediate needs of these students.

"NSEA's Children's Fund benefits many students all across Nebraska, especially in the winter months when children are in need of warm coats or proper boots and shoes," NSEA President Jenni Benson said.

The Children's Fund makes money available to NSEA members who might otherwise reach into their own pockets to buy a warm coat or a new pair of shoes for a student. In some cases, the fund supplements other sources of assistance and cooperates with merchants to help a child with a more complex problem, like a need for an eyeglass prescription.

The fund works to ensure that the physical, social and emotional needs of students do not stand in the way of their success in school.

There is never red tape or lengthy delay for members who want to use the fund. A toll-free call to 1-800-742-0047 is usually all that is needed. All requests are handled discreetly and confidentially.

The generosity of Children's Fund donors has helped pay for medical and dental needs, provided assistance to a family whose home and belongings were destroyed by fire, purchased a bus ticket for a child with no other means to get to school and much more. Contributions are tax deductible. For more information, call 1-800-742-0047 or go to:

nsea.org/childrensfund



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

Wanted: Proposals for NSEA University 2021

Mid-July is 22 weeks away, but discussions are already ongoing for plans for the third edition of the members-only NSEA University.

The first edition, held in 2019, featured more than 180 professional development breakout sessions and 300 educators attending at the University of Nebraska's Innovation Campus over three days. The 2020 edition was virtual and was shortened by the pandemic, but was a success as well.

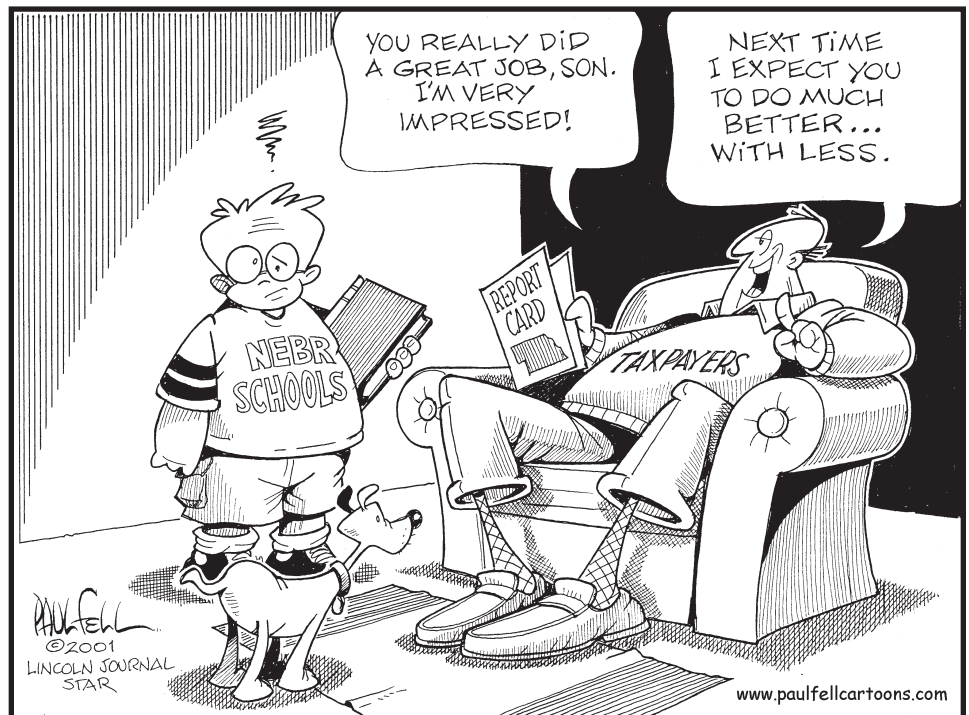
Planning has begun for the July 13-15, 2021, edition, and the first step is the RFP —

request for proposals — process, which is now under way. We are currently planning to return to Innovation Campus in July with hopes of a healthier 2021!

Topics are expected to cover issues such as social justice, leadership, educator wellness, advocacy and more. The conference will also attract nationally known keynote speakers.

If you have an area of expertise and would like to share your knowledge with teachers from across the state, complete the RFP application form found at:

<https://bit.ly/NSEAU-RFP>



Twenty Years Later, Same Message: For decades, Lincoln cartoonist Paul Fell has supported public education through his artwork. A former teacher and association member, Fell earned the 2020 NSEA Champion of Education Award, an honor usually bestowed at Delegate Assembly each April. The 2020 Assembly was virtual, so NSEA President Jenni Benson met with Fell in January to deliver the award. Sadly, Fell's cartoon, above, dated 2001, is still relevant. See details on Fell's award delivery on page 17.