

# *The* VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • January 2021



## THE ART OF ADVOCACY

*Millard Member's Experiences Elsewhere  
Renew Her Support of Nebraska Public Schools*

*Learn More  
About Your  
NSEA Executive  
Committee*



**NSEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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**A Great Public School  
for Every Child.**

# Food Banks Get Funding Bump with NSEA, NSEA-Retired Gifts

## Families Across State to Benefit from Donations

Some gifts from NSEA Children's Fund help Nebraska children and families in the smallest of ways, at the smallest expense. Other gifts are larger in scope, affecting a wide swath of children and families in need.

Such is the case with December action taken by the NSEA Children's Fund Board of Directors and the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors.

Action by the Children's Fund board approved a gift of \$15,000 to the Food Bank of the Heartland and \$10,000 to the Food Bank of Lincoln. The NSEA-Retired Board of Directors approved a gift of \$5,000 to the Food Bank of the Heartland.

"Teachers know that there are many children who face food insecurity at home — school is often the only place where these kids can get regular meals," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "This year, in particular, it seemed like a good idea to take a bigger step in meeting the needs of kids and families statewide."

The Food Bank of the Heartland has a statewide reach. The Food Bank of Lincoln has a regional reach in 16 southeast

Nebraska counties.

"Border-to-border, there are children and there are families suffering from hunger each and every day," said Benson. "Reducing food insecurity is absolutely part of the mission of NSEA."

The large gifts were not the first from NSEA and NSEA-Retired this year.

In April, the Children's Fund gave \$25,000 to the Food Bank of the Heartland, and NSEA-Retired gave \$5,000 to the Food Bank of Lincoln.

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, businesses and fundraisers 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**



## 'Premier' ESP Conference Offered Free

The 2021 NEA Education Support Professional (ESP) National Conference will take place virtually on March 19-21, followed by the NEA ESP of the Year celebration on Friday, March 26.

NSEA President Jenni Benson urged Nebraska ESPs to consider attendance. "This is the premier professional development opportunity for ESPs across the nation."

This year's conference will offer up to 30 live and 15 on-demand professional learning opportunities over the course of three days. In addition, participants will have multiple opportunities to network and share best practices and strategies with their peers.

The conference is offered to NEA members only. Registration will open in February 2021 and will be free of charge. Registration will be capped at 2,000 participants and will be confirmed on a first come, first served basis.

All workshop sessions will be 75 minutes in length and will be held on the afternoons of Saturday, March 20 and Sunday, March 21. Details about the conference can be found at:

**www.nea.org/espconference**

## 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:** Millard Education Association member Laura Fisher's travels have taught her the value of Nebraska's quality system of public schools, and she shares that lesson loudly. learn more beginning on Page 7.

# This is Who We Are.

Sometimes, in life's hustle and bustle, certain tasks get overlooked.

I realized recently that we've not properly introduced our NSEA Executive Committee for 2020-21. Pandemic, elections, a middle-of-summer Legislative session – to say this has been a topsy-turvy year is an understatement. So, if not at the start of the school year, what better time than the first week of January to introduce your elected leadership?

The NSEA Executive Committee is comprised of the Association president and vice president and two Nebraska representatives on the National Education Association Board of Directors. Each is elected from the ranks of active members. Each serves a maximum of two, three-year terms. I was elected to a second term at our Delegate Assembly business meeting in April. Vice President Robert Miller was elected to a first term at that time. NEA Director Tracy Hartman-Bradley has two years on a second term. NEA Director Linda Freye was elected to a second term in April.

I believe we make a formidable team as we lead the Board of Directors and the Association. We are also proof that we are a member-led organization: each of us has plenty of teaching experience, and Tracy and Linda work in classrooms each day. Robert is the full-time-release president of the Omaha Education Association.

Questions? Contact us at the email addresses found in the green box on Page 2 of this magazine!

## President Jenni Benson, Lincoln

**Teaching expertise:** I've taught special education PreK-Higher Ed during my entire 34-year career.

**Favorite book:** *Thank You Mr. Falker*, Patricia Polacco.

**Reading now:** *Dear Madam President*, Jennifer Palmieri.

**Best part of leadership:** I treasure relationships gained as I traveled 80,000-plus miles across Nebraska the last three years.

**How I relax on weekends:** Time with family and eight grandchildren.

**Reason for NSEA membership:** I first taught in south Texas and was asked to join the association my first year. The next spring, I was told I had been overpaid and would have to return \$200 each month for six months – a great deal of money in 1987! I called my state association, and a representative called the superintendent and said I would be accompanied by a union representative at my next meeting. The superintendent immediately softened his stance with a better solution. The experience moved me to become a building representative with NSEA when we returned to Nebraska.

**Favorite movie:** *Amistad*.

**My hope for NSEA in 2021:** "Hope" is an action word. There is no hope without action. The pandemic has dampened hope, delayed action. My hope is that we build on what we have learned and move forward, stronger by collective action. We must continue to meet student needs by helping teachers: our children count on us to deliver hope via action.

## Vice President Robert Miller, Omaha

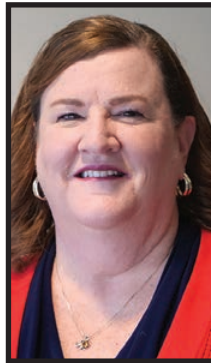
**Teaching expertise:** 20 years, Omaha Public Schools.

**Favorite book:** *Tuesdays with Morrie*, by Mitch Albom.

**Reading now:** *Faces at the Bottom of the Well: The Permanence of Racism*, by Derrick Bell.

**Best part of leadership:** It's an honor and privilege to serve as a leader for members and students. Working for positive change is rewarding as is knowing that each voice brings a different and deserving viewpoint.

**How I relax on weekends:** My wife and children have



**President  
Jenni Benson**



**Vice President  
Robert Miller**



**NEA Director  
Tracy Hartman-Bradley**



**NEA Director  
Linda Freye**

limited weekday time with Dad, and the oldest is college bound next year, so we make the most of weekends.

**Reason for NSEA membership:** I am thankful for the guidance of my college advisor, Dr. Lorrie Cook-Benjamin. She pushed me to get involved in an organization that makes change happen.

**Favorite movie:** *Remember the Titans*.

**Favorite comfort food:** Homemade biscuits, gravy. Nothing ever beat my grandmother's recipe.

**My hope for NSEA in 2021:** That we continue to move forward, increase membership and bring in our Early Career Educators, who have much to offer. We must be forward thinking, as yesterday is not ours to recover, but tomorrow is ours to win or lose.

## NEA Director Tracy Hartman-Bradley, Omaha

**Teaching expertise:** Three years as a grades 5-6 classroom teacher; 15 years as K-12 Native American specialist.

**Favorite book:** *Waterlily*, by Ella Cara Deloria.

**Reading now:** *How to be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi.

**Best part of leadership:** Helping association leaders grow, fighting for student rights and education.

**How I relax on weekends:** I'm truly a home body. Crochet and bead and skin sewing.

**If I could travel in time I would:** Go back to the 1400's or earlier, prior to the Russians coming to Alaska on my tribal lands. I would learn ceremonies that have been lost through assimilation, removal and genocide.

**Reason for NSEA membership:** Educators need a union fighting for educators and students. Knowing the union has your back in good times or bad makes our work easier.

**Favorite movie:** *The Color Purple*.

**My hope for NSEA in 2021:** My hope is that NSEA will grow stronger. We must continue to communicate to every educator about NSEA resources. We need to continue building membership by showing all educators what NSEA, locals and NEA offer to educators and students.

## NEA Director Linda Freye, Lincoln

**Teaching expertise:** Kindergarten for 20-plus years, also Head Start, second and third grades, and early childhood instructor at UNL.

**Favorite book:** I have a special spot for *The Velveteen Rabbit*!

**Reading now:** *What School Could Be*, Ted Dintersmith.

**Best part of leadership:** Helping others find their strengths and develop their leadership styles. I love being part of a leadership team that works together for the good of the association.

**How I relax on weekends:** Comfy clothes, snacks, a drink, and a good movie or TV show as I relax in my recliner!

**Reason for NSEA membership:** I was asked the first day of new teacher meetings if I wanted to join. I said 'yes.' I still feel the same way. I'm proud to be a member.

**Favorite movie:** *The Sixth Sense*.

**Favorite time of teaching day:** When I see a student "gets it" or feels proud of the answer or position they take. "A-ha" moments make me smile. I love the start of the day when students arrive with energy and lots of things to tell me.

**My hope for NSEA in 2021:** My hope is that NSEA works to solve problems we continue to encounter during the pandemic. I hope for funding, professional development, and a return to face-to-face teaching when appropriate. I want members to be safe at work, with support from families, administration, the public and our union.

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# 'Grinch' Governor Calls for Harmful Lids

## Ricketts: Cuts a 'Big Priority'

As if nine months and counting of teaching and learning during a pandemic were not enough, Gov. Pete Ricketts notified the state's education community a week before Christmas that he would play the role of The Grinch during the 2021 session of the Nebraska Legislature.

Ricketts said on Dec. 18 that he would seek to impose harmful spending limits on Nebraska public schools in 2021. "That will be a big priority," he said.

Ricketts' intent to further squeeze Nebraska public school funding comes even though:

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

- Deeper spending limits, 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.

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

Ricketts' remarks caused plenty of head-scratching.

"We are pinching every penny. The growth in school spending has been smaller than the growth in state (government) spending," Brad Wilkins, a member of the Ainsworth school board, told the Omaha World-Herald.



**Nebraska Legislature '21 Preview, Pages 7-8**

"To say our spending is out of control doesn't line up."

In a pandemic-ridden year when teachers and students have struggled mightily, NSEA President Jenni Benson called the governor out, and urged educators to push back.

"Teachers, students, education support professionals, administrators — all are worn down and worn out. Some have become sick from the virus, some have died. There are not nearly enough counselors, not nearly enough mental health resources, yet this governor wants to impose punitive lids that will cut school funding and hurt our students," said Benson.

"Rather than delivering such bad news, the education family needs a delivery of compassion and hope."

"We need parents and educators to contact the governor to ask him to back away from his call for spending limits, and instead to increase state aid," said Benson.

One good sign in that regard: state tax revenues were at \$2.4 billion through November, 9.6 percent above projections.

To write, call or email the governor, click on the 'Contact' link at:

<https://governor.nebraska.gov>

## Tell the Governor: 'No' Lids on Kids

To write, call or email Gov. Ricketts, click on 'Contact' at: <https://governor.nebraska.gov>

## NSEA Petitions State Board

### Effort to Seek Declaratory Order Denied, Issue of School Safety Protocol Spotlighted

With the state facing an historic pre-Thanksgiving surge of COVID-19, NSEA leadership took the unusual step of seeking a declaratory order from the State Board of Education, asking the board to adopt intervention and safety protocol requirements for the operation of Nebraska schools.

At the time, Nebraska had the sixth highest infection rate in the U.S. and the fourth highest rate of positive tests, with 735 cases per 100,000 population, compared with a national average of 294 per 100,000.

The action was taken to keep schools open, as many school districts were not requiring face mask use or other basic safety measures. The fear was that further school closures would cause long-term learning loss.

The board declined, saying "the board does not have the authority, by law, to issue such health mandates," indicating that authority rests with local school boards and the Department of Health and Human Services.

In response, NSEA President Jenni Benson said "teachers are doing everything they can to help their students, to keep the learning going and to keep kids safe and in school." She said earlier in the year, at the request of administrators, the board issued a declaratory order relieving school districts from many regulatory obligations during the pandemic.

In doing so, "the Board delegated broad authority to the Commissioner to grant administrators with "flexibility" in complying with nearly all statutory and regulatory requirements involving school operations, ranging from textbook returns to continued accreditation.

Then, when faced with a simple request to identify the basic mitigations associated with safe school operations in a pandemic, said Benson, the board claims a lack of legal authority to do so.

"The State Board of Education receives a grade of 'F' for this irresponsible, uncourageous decision," said Benson.

## NSEA to Nebraska Educators: Understand Your Vaccine Rights

### NSEA is Monitoring Requirements

While the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services vaccination plan puts the education sector in Phase 1B of the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, it has not yet been determined when that would be or who will be included in the "education sector."

In any event, NSEA members need to understand their rights as they pertain to employment issues.

Upon advice from legal counsel, NSEA has determined that school districts and public education institutions in Nebraska can likely require employees to be administered a vaccine as a condition of employment.

NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell said certain employees may be exempt from a vaccination requirement based on their personal medical circumstances under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Whether an employee is exempt under the ADA will be fact specific and subject to applicable legal criteria.

The nature and extent of the disability, the essential job functions of the assignment and whether a reasonable accommodation exists are relevant to assessing whether an employee may be exempt under the ADA. In very limited cases, an employee may also be exempt for religious reasons.

NSEA will continue to actively monitor vaccination requirements and developing regulations and guidelines. If you do not want to be administered the vaccine for medical or religious reasons, contact your NSEA organizational specialist so that your situation can be addressed. Find your organizational specialist at:

<https://www.nsea.org/field-staff-units>

Members should monitor the DHHS vaccine rollout at:

<https://bit.ly/nebvaccinedetails>



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**A Broader Experience:** After teaching experiences in California and Kansas, Millard Education Association member Laura Fisher is a strong defender of Nebraska's public schools.

# In the Defense of Public Schools

Millard Member's Experiences Elsewhere Renew Her Support of Nebraska Public Schools

Laura Fisher's teaching career has taken her across half the country and renewed her appreciation for Nebraska's public schools.

She has taught in states where public schools have been ravaged by deep funding cuts or have been targeted by legislation favoring vouchers and privatization. She has seen elementary schools where music, art and physical education have been stripped from the curriculum. She has witnessed as elected officials have cut taxes so deeply that they have crippled public schools and threatened their own state's credit rating.

Those first-hand experiences have led her back to Nebraska where she is a firm and vocal defender of public schools, and where she encourages Nebraskans to preserve and protect what she fears many may take for granted: a system of quality public schools.

"I think moving out of the Midwest

made me appreciate how lucky we are and how amazing our public schools are," said Fisher. "We train our teachers well. We care about our schools.

"I know our schools are amazing, but when you start losing funding, our class sizes get bigger, more work falls on teachers, and teachers take on, take on and take on – and they get burned out," she said. "I just don't want this to happen in Nebraska."

## 'Fighting for Public Schools'

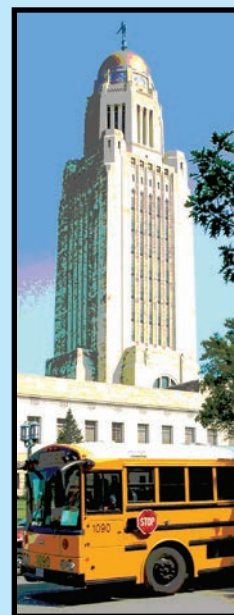
Fisher taught briefly in Lincoln before leaving for San Diego in 2003. She found schools badly underfunded, the result of overly constrictive property tax limits instituted with Proposition 13 more than 40 years ago. Her family moved to Kansas City in 2009, and soon watched as

## The First Session

of the 107th Nebraska Legislature convenes on Wednesday, Jan. 6, opening action for the 90-day session.

**Bills are introduced** for the first 10 days, with each bill eventually reviewed in a public hearing before a legislative committee. NSEA reads and assesses every bill related to Pre-K-16 education.

**To stay current on bills,** request NSEA's weekly Capitol Update by emailing: [cathy.schapmann@nsea.org](mailto:cathy.schapmann@nsea.org)



**Nebraska Legislature '21**

Gov. Sam Brownback's move to eliminate corporate and other taxes decimated Kansas public schools, even causing the closure of the neighborhood school her son attended.

In 2016 her husband took a research post at the University of Nebraska Medical

Center in Omaha and the family moved back to Nebraska, settling in Elkhorn. Fisher found work teaching art with the Millard Public Schools at Russell Middle School.

The California and Kansas experiences caused Fisher to take notice of politics, to begin to support public education-friendly candidates, and even garner some notice as she voiced defense of public schools at a town hall event in the Omaha area early last March. At that event, she asked Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan about her bills (LB1202 and LB974) to give dollar-for-dollar tax breaks for private school donors and to reduce the taxable value of property for school funding purposes. Had they passed, both would have further de-funded public schools.

That occasion reinforced Fisher's belief that there are political actors who do not always have the best interest of public schools at heart. Fisher, on the other hand, is all in for public schools and hopes that others will make the same commitment.

"I'm fighting for my child, your child, my profession as a teacher and our public schools," she said.

### Causing Pain in Kansas

Fisher began teaching in Lincoln, and once married, started moving. A brief stop in St. Louis was followed by a move to San Diego, a paradise where "I didn't dream I wouldn't be able to find a job."

An unintended consequence of California's Proposition 13, which passed in 1978 and severely limited property taxes, was the damage to school budgets and programs for students. The cuts were devastating – there was no elementary art, physical education or music during her family's six years in the area. Teachers with little experience were frequently pink slipped, even in years when there were teacher shortages. "It was a shock. I ended up substituting," said Fisher.

When her son neared kindergarten age, Fisher and her husband looked to the Midwest. They had heard good things about

## Legislative Agenda: Budget, Health, Quality

The Nebraska Legislature convenes Wednesday, Jan. 6, and there is much work to be done.

Among concerns for educators – and taxpayers – is the budget outlook for the state. Projections indicate that the state will face a budget shortfall in the range of \$291 million. The cost of LB1107, a property tax reform bill passed last year, turned a projected \$133 million surplus into that deficit.

Elsewhere, your Association's 2021 Legislative goals will focus on legislation:

- Protecting the health of our students, teachers and school staff and mitigating the financial impact of the COVID-19 and future pandemics;

- Expanding both the quality and quantity of learning in our public schools,

because learning is how we prepare future generations to succeed;

- Adding to the tools and resources available to educators, because well-trained and well-equipped educators provide professional excellence in our classrooms;

- Favoring opportunities that will meet the needs of every child through specific and inclusive policy that addresses our diverse demographics;

- Increasing state aid for public education, because state revenue shortfalls should not be balanced by reducing an already substandard level of state financial support for education.

Learn more at:

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

the schools around Kansas City, KS, and soon found an opportunity for her husband's career in science research. She took a job in Shawnee Mission. What they didn't see coming was Brownback's "March to Zero" plan to eliminate the state's income and corporate taxes.

Fisher said March to Zero was designed to attract corporations to Kansas, but also meant to slowly starve and defund public schools, making it easier to eventually privatize public education.

"I don't even have words for the pain this caused Kansas," said Fisher.

What the "March" did was cause nine rounds of state budget cuts, two sales tax hikes, three downgrades of the state's credit rating and record state debt. The Kansas Legislature even skipped making its payments to the state pension plan for teachers and state employees. At one point, there were 330,000 limited liability corporations in Kansas paying *zero* income tax.

By 2012, the school in Fisher's neighborhood closed due to funding issues and her second-grade son was bused to

another school. That school was so crowded that cafeteria tables had to be put up in hallways. Extra-curriculars like middle school sports were cut.

"We lived there eight years and there was at least \$30 million cut from the budget of my school district alone," she said. "It's going to take years to recover."

### Time to Speak Out

Today, Fisher teaches art in Nebraska, actively supports candidates who support public schools and talks freely about the value and importance of public schools.

"I don't want what happened to Kansas to happen to my home state," she said.

She said Nebraska's good schools drew her family back to the state. "They talk about brain drain – my husband is definitely a brain – and the public schools are why we came back," she said.

It saddens her that she sees the same tactics used to harm schools in Kansas being employed in Nebraska – which is why she attended the town hall event with Sen. Linehan last year. Fisher asked about the senator's bill on dollar-for-dollar tax deductions for private school donors, and Linehan's initial response noted that law enforcement was present at the meeting, as if asking a question posed a threat to her.

"I know you can't get in trouble for politely asking questions of your representative, so that moment lit the fire," said Fisher.

It would be devastating if vouchers or charter schools are allowed in Nebraska, as they would pull funds from public schools, said Fisher. But there is big money behind those movements.

"It would be devastating if it happens here, but it's hard to go up against that money," she said. "So you speak out. That's what it takes."

Indeed, if we don't speak up, our students, our public schools and our state may suffer irreparable harm.

## Virus Can't Slow 'Dine and Discuss' Tradition

For years, leaders in NSEA's Metro District and Capitol District have hosted dinners that allow members and state senators to dine and discuss education issues prior to the start of the Legislative session in January.

The fact that the pandemic cut out the "dine" and "together" aspects of the annual events did not hamper attendance at the December meetings. Even though they were held virtually, attendance numbers were in line with those from past, in-person dinners.

Nor did the virtual aspect hamper discussion, much of which focused on the frustration of front-line educators being excluded from the decision-making process when it comes to pandemic-related issues and education issues in general.

"Members did a great job advocating for the profession with senators and State Board of Education members," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

The attendance roster showed 76 participants, including 10 senators and four State Board members, at the Capitol District event. The Metro District had 82 attendees, including a best-ever 13 state senators and three State Board of Education members.

"Members talking with policy-makers is the best possible advocacy," said Benson.

# Health Resources at Your Fingertips

## EHA Population Health Plan Gives Fast, Easy Access to BCBS Health Care Aid

You play a key role in helping students gain the knowledge they need to live a happy and healthy life. Part of living a happy and healthy life yourself includes making the most of your health insurance coverage.

It can be a challenge to know where to go when you need care or help reaching your health goals. With the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) Population Health program from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE), personalized support is a few quick clicks away.

EHA Population Health provides members with access to a nurse health coach, who offers one-on-one support through Wellframe, a mobile app. Your health coach works with you to create a care plan that takes your specific plan benefits and costs into account. The program can help you:

- Lower health risks;
- Navigate the health care system;
- Meet your health and wellness goals.

Several personalized care programs, such as diabetes support, health coaching and pregnancy care, are available to assist in navigating your specific needs. As a part of these programs, you get a variety of tools and resources to balance your well-being, including medication reminders, an activity tracker, daily to-dos and more.

### Take It From Another Member

An EHA member who needed help managing their diabetes participated in the program and shared their story of working with Kelly, a BCBSNE nurse health coach.

When the member was at risk for complications, such as cardiovascular disease and nerve damage stemming from diabetes, they worked with Kelly to improve their health.

The member cut back on carbs, began walking more and tracked their blood sugars and medication through the app, so Kelly could assist in managing their condition by monitoring their health, answering questions and providing patient-specific educational materials.

Since participating in EHA Population Health, the member has successfully lowered their risk of complications and reports feeling better. They had kind words for Kelly:

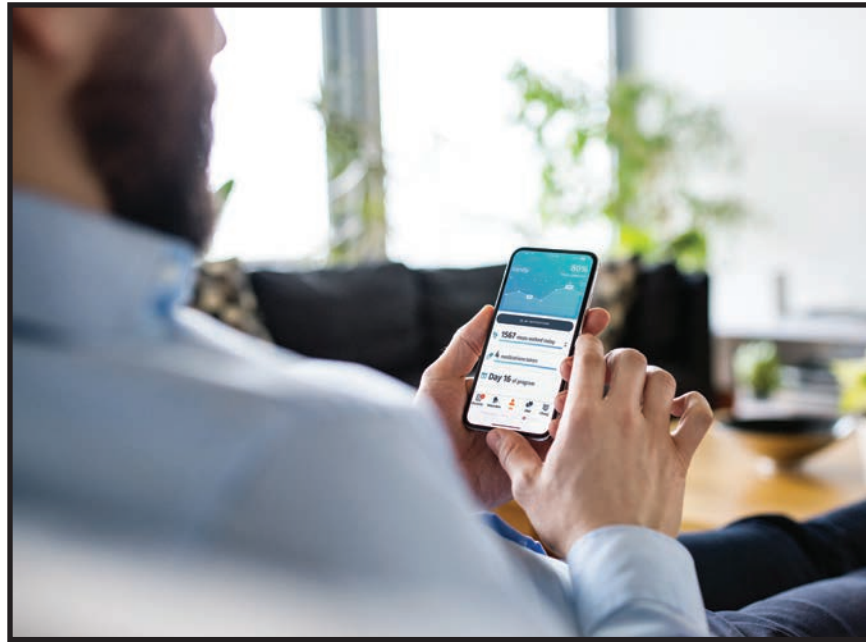
“You are truly a caring person,” the member said. “You take care of my mental health and other health, too. I have had my head in this game of life thanks to you, and I feel that I’m doing well right now. So, thank you. Bug me all you want — I always treasure what you have to say.”

Want to learn how the program can help you? Call 1-877-721-2583, or visit:

**NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP**

### NSEA Founded Plan

The Educators Health Alliance manages the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plans that serve all but four



**From the Comfort of Home: With the EHA Population Health program, EHA plan members can get access to a nurse health coach from the comfort of home.**

Nebraska K-12 school districts. The health care plans grew out of an arrangement NSEA first secured with BCBSNE in the late 1950s.

Today, the EHA Board of Directors includes six NSEA representatives, and three each from the Nebraska Council of School Administrators and the Nebraska Association of School Boards. NSEA Associate Executive Director and Comptroller Sheri Jablonski chairs the EHA Board of Directors.

Wellframe is an independent company that provides mobile enabled care management services for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Wellframe is responsible for its services.

A person is shown from the side, sitting on a bed in a meditative pose. They are holding a smartphone. In front of them is a laptop and a mug. The background is a bright, indoor setting with a window and some plants.

## STRESS CAN IMPACT YOUR HEALTH

Common effects of stress include headaches, muscle tension, anxiety or depression. Left unchecked, stress can also lead to more serious problems.

With EHA Population Health, a nurse health coach will help you recognize stress symptoms and manage your levels.

**Sign up at [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP](https://NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPOP)**

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# OEA 'Snowtests' to Save Snow Days

## Association's Virtual Rally Seeks to Save Winter Tradition

Generations of students and teachers have cherished and anticipated snow days, those middle-of-winter, often unexpected vacations.

So, when the Omaha Public Schools Administration announced in November that future snow days would need to look different, complete with computers and teachers working from home, Omaha Education Association leadership, and then members, pushed back. The OEA didn't organize a protest, but instead put together a "Snowtest" to spread the word and gain member support.

The OPS decision came after minimal back-and-forth discussion with OEA leaders and ignored longstanding past practice that observed snow days as non-teacher and non-student days. OEA repeatedly pointed out problems with the synchronous plan for instruction, lack of connectivity, potential power outages, teachers having to care for their own school-aged children and students having to care for their own, younger, siblings on snow days.

"Once the plan was on paper we saw that there were multiple issues, and we challenged the district on each of them," said OEA President Robert Miller.

### 'Save Our Snow Days'

With the district standing firm, NSEA Organizational Specialists Liz Figueroa and Becca Dingwell began organizing input from members, parents and students. Figueroa borrowed the "Snowtest" idea from a Youngstown State University event, and they planned a Zoom rally on Facebook. Miller came up with "SOS – Save Our Snow Days" and said OEA members believe it important that snow days not become another loved tradition struck down by the virus.

"We fielded quite a few phone calls and answered many, many emails from upset members prior to the Snowtest taking place," said Figueroa. "Afterward, we had members reaching out to the office

interested in further action they could take."

The Snowtest was held on a Sunday in early December. Four teachers, two parents and a student shared their reasons for saving snow days. More than 6,200 teachers, parents and citizens were reached by the Facebook rally.

### 'Sacrificing Joy'

OEA member Octavia Butler was the last to speak at the rally.

"The excitement and hope that a snow day evokes for children of all ages should not be so readily sacrificed, particularly in this, the hardest of school years," said Butler.

"The current snow day plan not only sacrifices this joy, which is listed as a foundational value of OPS in their Strategic Plan of Action, but it also negates the consistency that all educators know is necessary.

"This snow day schedule would be implemented last minute and without any flexibility, making it inequitable," said Butler. "How much more can we ask of our families? At the end of the day, it is the children we serve. And they are, after all, only children. The joy, room to breathe, or space to help out at home should be a flexibility afforded all of the children and families of OPS. Snow days must remain intact."

### Making Memories

The district has proposed placing snow day/inclement weather days language in the contract. The OEA has not yet addressed that language and it remains to be settled through negotiations.

Snow days are for making memories for students and parents, said Miller. Children should enjoy snow adventures, time spent with parents, baking, hot chocolate after trips outside to finish 'Frosty' and to throw a few snowballs at your nemeses.

"These are but a few things being taken away and replaced with screen time," he said.

OEA has heard from staff and parents and is working to address the concern that OPS not let another tradition be taken away by the virus.



## PD Offerings Cover Resilience, Technology Issues

NSEA is fast becoming your best source for professional development. This list of professional development opportunities over the next two months shows why. The NSEA webinars cover classroom needs, personal care and education technology issues.

"We're building a really good listing of professional development programming for members," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

Sessions are one hour, unless noted. To register, go to:

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

### Membership/Association Workshops

Tuesday, Jan. 12, 6 p.m.: **NEA Member Benefits Overview.**

Thursday, Jan. 14, 5 p.m.: **Charting the Course.**

Thursday, Jan. 28, 5:30 p.m.: **Women and Retirement.**

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

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

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

### New Educator Online Learning Opportunities

Monday, Jan. 11, 6:30 p.m.: **Resilience for Educators** — Learn habits to build resilience to help you bounce back and thrive.

Tuesday, Jan. 19, 7 p.m.: **Mindfulness for Educators** — How to live life in the present moment and why that's important to our well-being now and in the future.

Thursday, Jan. 21, 6 p.m.: **Planning for Uncertainty** — Collaborative decision-making processes and drawing on real-world situations, trainers 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).

Tuesday, Jan. 26, 6 p.m.: Repeat of **Planning for Uncertainty.**

Tuesday, Feb. 23, 6 p.m.: Repeat of **Planning for Uncertainty.**

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

### EdTech Webinar Series

Wednesday, Jan. 6, 6 p.m.: **Leveling Up Schoology for Distance Learning** — Leverage Schoology features to create synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities while growing community. Materials, gradebook, attendance, analytics and conferences will be reviewed so you are ready to use Schoology to its fullest (90 minutes).

Wednesday, Jan. 13, 6 p.m.: **Leveling up Google Classroom for Distance Learning** — Now is the time to take your Google Classroom to the next level (90 minutes).

Wednesday, Jan. 20, 6 p.m.: **Leveling up Seesaw for Distance Learning** — Beginning and intermediate Seesaw users will take a deeper dive into the features of Seesaw and models of how we can organically embed authentic social emotional supports (90 minutes).

Wednesday, Jan. 27, 6 p.m.: **Screencasting: Loom, Google Meet, Screencastify** — Many options to screen record are wonderful. The benefits? No downloading, waiting or fuss (90 minutes).

# A Lesson in Value

## You Get What You Pay For

A growing number of stories from educators who left – and returned – to NSEA give testimony to the tried and true adage that “you get what you pay for.”

The stories on these pages are about members who returned to NSEA from the Association of American Educators, a group purporting to be a professional teaching organization but with little in the way of service, no staff in or familiar with Nebraska, and a record of opposing bargaining and member advocacy.

In fact, AAE leadership may have deeper ties to anti-public education organizations than to public schools. Founded in 1996 by a West Coast insurance salesman, the AAE, along with organizations like the Freedom Foundation and Choice for Teachers, are funded by corporate interests linked to the DeVos family, the Koch brothers and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Their goal: to eliminate public-employee unions, including the NSEA and our local associations. The long game is to divert public dollars to privatization of public schools. In many places, the teacher’s union is all that stands between public schools and these bad actors.

“NSEA is the only association that truly advocates for educators, all students and public schools,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

“None of these groups have staff on the ground working with members, advocating for members, working with state senators for passage of legislation that will benefit students and public education,” said Benson. “AAE was not at the state capitol three years ago when NSEA defeated a bill that would have flunked every third-grade student who could not read at a certain level. Our members know that not every child learns at the same rate, and that this was a bad bill. AAE was nowhere to be seen.”

Nor does AAE work to provide quality, affordable health insurance (see page 9); fight for fair and decent wages; or work to assist members who have been treated unfairly, as do the 18 NSEA organizational specialists (see page 15) stationed across Nebraska who work with members daily.

There’s no doubt: your money is best spent wisely, and on quality: NSEA.

# Membership Provides C

DeDe Marshall admits that when her membership in the American Association of Educators lapsed a few years ago, she felt a bit lost.

“I was with AAE for several years, and then I dropped my membership and it felt like I didn’t belong to anything,” she said.

She was without membership or support of any kind for several years and said, “I was uncomfortable doing that.”

She is no longer uncomfortable. Marshall, who has taught for Westside District 66 in Omaha for 22 years, the last 21 at Swanson Elementary, has now come full circle and is pleased to have done so. She has rejoined her *professional* education association and today feels fully supported in her teaching by the Westside Education Association and the NSEA.

Early in her career, Marshall joined the Westside Education Association and NSEA. But when Marshall and her husband began thinking about starting a family, they tightened the family budget and she left WEA and NSEA for the AAE.

A common theme heard from those who leave NSEA is the “need to save money,” said Jenni Benson, NSEA president. Benson has advice in that regard.

“You might save a few dollars in the short run, but there are two serious considerations,” said Benson. “First, there is real, tangible value and benefit in having membership in NSEA, from professional development to the purchasing power supplied by NEA Member Benefits.

“Second, you have protection through NSEA for your most valuable possession: the career you poured thousands of dollars and years of your time into.”

### ‘Never Really Sure of Coverage’

Those points fed some of the unease that made Marshall uncomfortable when she was without Association membership. Then, last year, during a membership campaign at Westside, Marshall was asked, and rejoined WEA and NSEA.

“We have a great building rep here in Maggie Person. She’s talked a lot about membership,” said Marshall. That comment points out another clear benefit of

belonging to NSEA. Marshall’s building in the southwest is a high school. Specialists NSEA organizational associations and those school districts.

While with NSEA, Marshall was really sure that she had the kind of support that NSEA and NSEA provided.

She did call Benson a couple of times. “I was a lot of ‘Please for calling?’ and ‘Thank you.’”

Today, she’s in administration and decision-making. The benefit of membership is clear.

Marshall said she’s been at local issues from the beginning and webinars with members from other districts.

“That’s just what that’s the kind of support that NSEA provides.”

Marshall is now in the WEA and NSEA. “I’m trying to get more involved.”

# Advocacy, a Voice and a

During his early years at Millard’s Russell Middle School, Grant Christiansen was a full-fledged member of the Millard Education Association and the NSEA.

When it came time to start thinking about raising a family, Christiansen a skilled and technical sciences teacher, turned to a lesser organization – the American Association of Educators – to save a few bucks and maintain liability insurance.

“I just wanted liability insurance. As an industrial technology teacher, it’s not an option to not have that,” he said.

As Christiansen eventually learned, the ancient adage is true: you get what you pay for. The AAE’s membership fee was cheaper, but aside from liability coverage, very little was offered.

On the other hand, Christiansen sees great value in NSEA membership. Along with liability insurance, he cites advocacy, contract negotiations, and the chance to have a voice in Association and school district matters as some of the benefits.

### On-the-Ground Advocacy

His early-career decision to leave NSEA for AAE was strictly financial. Christiansen joined AAE, had the insurance, received an occasional mailer and little else.

“With AAE, I never talked to anybody there, ever,” he said. “I didn’t have an issue, so I didn’t need to talk to them, but I also didn’t have any advocacy. I didn’t have any knowledge of what was going on within my district through them.”

As his career progressed, as his teaching skills grew, as he took on leadership positions and responsibility, he better understood the benefits of Millard Education Association and NSEA membership.

“Before that, I really didn’t understand the value I was getting,” he said.

A pair of teaching colleagues – Christiansen refers to them as his mentors – talked to him about NSEA membership and he rejoined. “Then they talked me into being a building representative, and now I’m kind of on the inside and truly know the value of membership,” he said.

As a building representative, one of the key benefits of NSEA advocacy for members is the ability to have a voice in school district matters.

“I know, from my experience, I wouldn’t get a call if I needed it. If I called, NSEA would assign me to Millard. In most cases, school districts don’t have a building rep.”

“I know I can’t get a call. He has referred me to contact with the building rep. a solution that district doesn’t have what they need.”

“That gives me a rep, knowing that I can get away,” he said.

Early on, Christiansen joined the Association role.

“I know I can’t get a call. I know how that disenfranchised. I get more involved.”

“As I started working, what the value of membership is a value for me. Membership is a value for me.”

# Comfort, Inclusivity and Much More

SEA – representatives in every school state, in addition to the 18 organizational A has stationed across Nebraska. Each specialist is assigned to a set of local and works with leaders and members in districts.

the AAE, Marshall said she “never felt I would have any kind of coverage, any” that could compare to that offered by A.

l AAE about her membership fee “as and I couldn’t talk to any person. It ease press two’ or ‘What is your reason that kind of thing,” she said.

cites the WEA’s work with her district in making educator voices heard in the g process concerning the pandemic as a ership.

## ‘I Feel Safe’

id she’s also received information on n the WEA, has participated in meetings with WEA and NSEA and listened as other local associations have discussed and the work of NSEA in that arena.

another whole level of inclusivity – of thing I was looking for,” she said.

working to convince a colleague to join and NSEA.

to get her to join because anything could happen. You could be



**WEA Member Once Again:** Early in her career, DeDe Marshall belonged to the Westside Education Association. She left for another organization for a time, but was never certain she had the level of support she gets from WEA and NSEA.

the hardest worker with the best reputation, and it just takes one incident to end it,” she said.

“I just feel safe having membership.”

# a Chance to ‘Move the Needle’

g rep, he has repeatedly seen, firsthand, benefits of membership: on-the-ground members in need of assistance.

## Quick Service

m my experience as a building rep, that n AAE person in my building the same it,” he said. Christiansen knows that with rganizational Specialist Andy Isaacson, ard, can be on-site within 24 hours, and ooner.

n have that if I need it,” said Christiansen. colleagues to Isaacson, who is “in instant m, advocating quickly, working towards ay and guiding that person right through to do.

me a lot more confidence as a building hat I have that resource available right



**Millard Leader:** For a few years, Grant Christiansen was a member of an organization that provided liability insurance, but little else. Today, as a leader in the Millard Education Association, he is a firm believer in Association membership.

heard. And sometimes I get to move the needle a little bit,” he said.

His advice to a non-member?

“It’s the best \$70 a month you’re going to spend to protect your career, and not only your personal career, but the bigger career – teaching as a whole,” he said.

## ‘Move the Needle’

Christiansen didn’t understand the e in bargaining for salary and benefits.

got the contract every year. I didn’t at was put together, so I felt a little ,” he said. That changed as he began to ed.

l to learn more about how negotiations sausage-making process looks like, I understand that the money I or the advocacy we have,” he said.

o also gives him a voice. “I go to meetings and let my word be

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# 18 Organizational Specialists Give NSEA Members an Edge

## Association's Field Staff Know Nebraska Schools, Rules, Regs

No matter how long you may have taught, no matter how much experience you have, there comes a time when you come across a question you can't answer, a situation you don't know how to handle.

That's where NSEA comes into play. Consider this question from a retired teacher caught in a conundrum as a substitute:

*"I am a retired teacher and work occasionally as a sub. I was at a school last Friday subbing for 10-12 English and was told I had to cover Freshman English (for a different teacher) during the only free period I had that day. So, I had to teach the full day with a 29-minute lunch period as my only break. Is this legal even if I am a sub? I guess I need to know my rights as a sub, or if I don't really have any."*

When it comes to questions about your rights as a teacher, there is no out-of-state, storefront-based, quasi-professional membership group that will have a ready answer. Such organizations don't have any of the staff expertise and knowledge of Nebraska Department of Education rules,

regulations and requirements regarding teaching certificates. Those groups can't answer a single question about Nebraska statutes governing education. They couldn't find most Nebraska school districts without a map.

NSEA staff, on the other hand, own that expertise and knowledge. NSEA's 18 field staffers are located across the state to serve and meet with members in their school buildings or in their homes, if needed, to supply or find answers to questions like the one posed above.

NSEA gets many such questions each week, via e-mail through the website, phone calls to one of the 18 organizational specialists, and via personal visits with NSEA staff.

Whatever your question about your employment issues, classroom issues, bargaining situations or more, know that you can contact your NSEA organizational specialist in complete confidentiality. Call your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047, or send your question through the 'Contact Us' feature of the NSEA website at:

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

You will draw your answer from years of experience and expertise that gives you "The NSEA Edge."



## Members Can Get Telehealth Care, Behavioral Health, Through Amwell

Getting an appointment with your doctor when you're sick can be challenging. With telehealth services from Amwell, you can video chat with a U.S. board-certified doctor from the convenience of your mobile device or computer. The average wait time is less than 10 minutes and it costs less than a visit to the emergency room or urgent care.

Telehealth services are available 24/7 in all 50 states. It's perfect when your doctor's office is closed, you're too sick or busy to go in person, or when traveling. You can use telehealth services for ailments like sinus infections, colds, flu, fever, rash, abdominal pain, pinkeye, ear infection, migraines or sore throat.

Behavioral health services are also available from licensed therapists seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., local time.

There are three ways to register, all easy: download the Amwell app, visit Amwell.

com or call 1-844-733-3627. Then enter service key BCBSNE and your Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska member identification number to ensure you are charged the correct amount. You'll be asked a few health questions and given a list of doctors to choose from, or you may select the next available. After your video chat, you can view the doctor's notes and diagnosis. If needed, the doctor can prescribe medication from the pharmacy you choose.

To learn more, visit:

[NebraskaBlue.com/Telehealth](http://NebraskaBlue.com/Telehealth)

This is another service brought to you by Educators Health Alliance, which manages the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plan used by most Nebraska educators. The plan originated with NSEA more than 60 years ago and is now managed in partnership with the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.



## Applications Open for 'Conversations on Race, Belonging' Introductory Sessions Offered for NSEA Program

Members interested in learning more about NSEA's Conversations About Race and Belonging program now have a chance to participate in a two-part introduction before applying to participate in the full six-part program later this spring.

The six-session spring series is designed to encourage participants to improve their personal racial understanding based on self-examination and awareness. The program builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation and storytelling, among other methods.

Members can choose to attend introductory sessions over two dates in January or on one day in March. The dates and times are:

■ Thursday, Jan. 14, from 7-9 p.m.; and Saturday, Jan. 16, from 10 a.m. to noon.

■ 10 a.m. to noon, and 1-3 p.m. on Saturday, March 13.

The six-part session will meet every other Saturday, beginning on Saturday, April 3, with each session scheduled for 2.5 hours. Space is extremely limited, and registration for the January intro session will close on Sunday, January 10. Watch *The Voice* and social media for details on the March introductory program.

For more details and to apply, go to:

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

A third introductory session, and another edition of the six-part series, may be scheduled during the spring and summer of 2021. Watch *The Voice* and NSEA social media for details.

# ONLINE

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Online

# Delegates to Assembly Set Association's Path

## Members Also to Elect EMAC Rep, Update Bylaws and Resolutions

For a second year, NSEA's annual business meeting — Delegate Assembly — will be held virtually.

The NSEA Board of Directors made that decision during a virtual meeting in December.

The decision to go virtual does not mean, however, that the event will be any less effective or meaningful than an in-person gathering.

"We had a great virtual Assembly in 2020, and by April everyone will have a year or more of virtual meetings behind them. By comparison, the 2021 Delegate Assembly will be a success," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

It should also be busy.

First and foremost, delegates will elect at-large members to serve on the NSEA Board representing the Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC) and the Higher Education Affairs Committee (HEAC). The member elected for EMAC will serve a three-year term and the Higher Ed member will serve the remainder of the open term which is one year; both begin on Aug. 1. Any active NSEA member in good standing is eligible to file for election.

Because the nation was in the early stages of the pandemic in April 2020, and because large-scale virtual meetings were fairly new to most, no updates were

proposed to the Association's Bylaws or Resolutions at last year's Assembly. So there will almost certainly be changes to those documents proposed and debated at the April meeting.

The Bylaws are the Association's governing rules; the Resolutions are the guiding principals.

A nationally prominent speaker is planned for the Friday night session, with details to be announced soon. Delegates will also set the dues rate for the 2021-22 Association year.

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 information to NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell not less than 45 days prior to April 23. The actual deadline for that action is 11:59 p.m. CST on Tuesday, March 9, 2021. Contact Fennell at:

[maddie.fennell@nsea.org](mailto:maddie.fennell@nsea.org)

Candidates may also advertise in NSEA's monthly magazine, *The Voice*. For rates and deadlines, email:

[al.koontz@nsea.org](mailto:al.koontz@nsea.org)

The 2021 event will mark the 160th time members have met since the Association was founded in Brownville in October 1867. Members have met more than once a year on several occasions.

Questions? Contact NSEA at 1-800-742-0047.



## Honor a Co-worker at 2021 DA

### Administrator to be Cited

New this year: members will be able to recognize an outstanding administrator at NSEA's Delegate Assembly awards program.

The Administrator of Excellence Award will be delivered for the first time this year, following action by the Delegate Assembly to approve the award two years ago.

The award honors 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 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](https://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 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.

## Three Dozen District Seats Up for Election

Leadership should be in your future.

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. Electees will assume roles in determining the Association's future. But first, those candidates must file for election.

The window for filing opens on Friday, 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, and 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 NSEA website is at:

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

## FILE FOR OFFICE

**Jan. 1 - Feb. 7**, members file for state and district offices to be elected during Feb. 19-March 14 voting.

## VOTING

Voting for district officers, NSEA board, RA At-Large & Cluster Delegates will take place from **Feb. 19 - March 14**.

## DA CLUSTER DELEGATES

Filing for NSEA Delegate Assembly Cluster Delegates runs **Feb. 22 - March 7**.

## ETHNIC & MINORITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE AT-LARGE SEAT

Elected at Delegate Assembly. Candidate's campaign materials for delegates are due **by March 9**.

## VOTING

Locals with fewer than 26 members will vote for NSEA Delegate Assembly Cluster delegates **March 14 - 23**.

## LOCAL NSEA DELEGATES

Locals of 26+ members will elect delegates by secret ballot and report verified delegates **by March 24**.

## NSEA-RETIRED

Election of NSEA-Retired officers, and delegates to both DA and RA will be by mail-in ballot **in March**.

## ASPIRING EDUCATORS

Aspiring Educators members will vote for their NSEA Delegate Assembly delegates at the AE Delegate Assembly, **April 9-10**.

## NSEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY

**April 23 - 24**  
Election of NSEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee At-Large member on the NSEA Board, plus Bylaws, 2021-22 Association dues.

## REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY

Nat'l. Education Assoc. Representative Assembly **July 2 - 6, 2021**

# OFFICIAL ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT

**ALL NSEA MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FOR DISTRICT OFFICERS AND REPRESENTATIVE ASSEMBLY AT-LARGE DELEGATES.**  
**VOTING WILL BE FEB. 19 - MARCH 14.**

**ALL MEMBERS ARE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE FOR THEIR LOCAL ASSOCIATION DELEGATES TO NSEA DELEGATE ASSEMBLY.**  
**CLUSTERED LOCALS WILL VOTE MARCH 14 - 23. LOCALS WITH MORE THAN 26 MEMBERS, TALK TO YOUR LOCAL PRESIDENT FOR YOUR LOCAL ELECTION TIMELINE.**

## NSEA ELECTIONS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

It is time to consider filing for Association office and/or as a delegate to the statewide and/or national assemblies. Elections will occur in the coming months in order to comply with federal statute which dictates all officers and delegates must be elected by secret ballot. Here are the details:

### At-Large seats for Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee (3-year term) and Higher Education Affairs Committee (1-year, remainder of term) on the NSEA Board of Directors

*Elected at NSEA Delegate Assembly*

Nominations for these offices are taken from the floor of the NSEA Delegate Assembly at the opening session on Saturday, April 24, in Lincoln.

Candidates seeking these offices who wish to have campaign materials posted for delegates must submit that information to NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell by 11:59 p.m. CST on Tuesday, March 9. Email her at:

[maddie.fennell@nsea.org](mailto:maddie.fennell@nsea.org)

Candidates are responsible for reviewing the candidate policy guidelines found at:

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

### NSEA Board of Directors, 3-year terms

*Deadline to File: Sunday, Feb. 7*

*Elected during statewide online elections*

Members in five of NSEA's six governance districts will elect representatives to serve on NSEA's statewide Board of Directors.

The NSEA Board of Directors meets at least seven times each year, and as needed. The board carries out the Association's mission as directed by members at the April Delegate Assembly.

There is one open seat each from the Metro, Capitol, Tri-Valley, Sandhills and Elkhorn districts. There are no vacancies on the Panhandle District. (see map)

### District Officers, 1-, 2- and 3-year terms

*Deadline to File: Sunday, Feb. 7*

*Elected during statewide online elections*

Each of NSEA's six governance districts include a set of officers and executive committee members. Officers from each district are elected by members in that district. The term of office is determined by the Bylaws in each district. Members will fill these vacancies:

- **Capitol District:** vice president, treasurer, secretary and one seat on the executive committee.
- **Elkhorn District:** president, vice president, one seat on the executive committee.
- **Metro District:** treasurer, secretary and seven seats on the executive committee (subdistrict seats 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10).
- **Panhandle District:** vice president, treasurer, secretary and three seats on the executive committee (Areas 2, 3, 4).
- **Sandhills District:** president, vice president, one seat on the executive committee.

- **Tri-Valley District:** president, vice president, and three seats on the executive committee (one each from the East, West and Central subdistricts).

### NEA RA At-Large District Cluster Delegates: 1-year term

*Deadline to File: Sunday, Feb. 7*

*Elected during statewide online elections*

The 2021 NEA RA will be held July 2-6, 2021.

To elect members to serve as voting delegates to the National Education Association's annual Representative Assembly business meeting, **local associations with fewer than 76 members** are grouped in clusters per district. For instance, all local associations in Elkhorn District with fewer than 76 members will vote on a common set of candidates to serve as delegates to RA.

Cluster delegates fund their own RA costs. The exact number of openings will be set after the membership count for 2020-21 is finalized in mid-January, but there are approximately:

- **Capitol District:** 10 openings
- **Elkhorn District:** 10 openings
- **Metro District:** 8 openings
- **Panhandle District:** 3 openings
- **Sandhills District:** 7 openings
- **Tri-Valley District:** 10 openings

### Aspiring Educators (formerly Student Education Association of Nebraska) Delegate to NEA RA: 1-year term

Members of Aspiring Educators (formerly the Student Education Association of Nebraska, or SEAN) will elect delegates to the NSEA Delegate Assembly at a virtual Delegate Assembly on Saturday, March 27. Watch for the Aspiring Educators newsletter for details on how to attend.

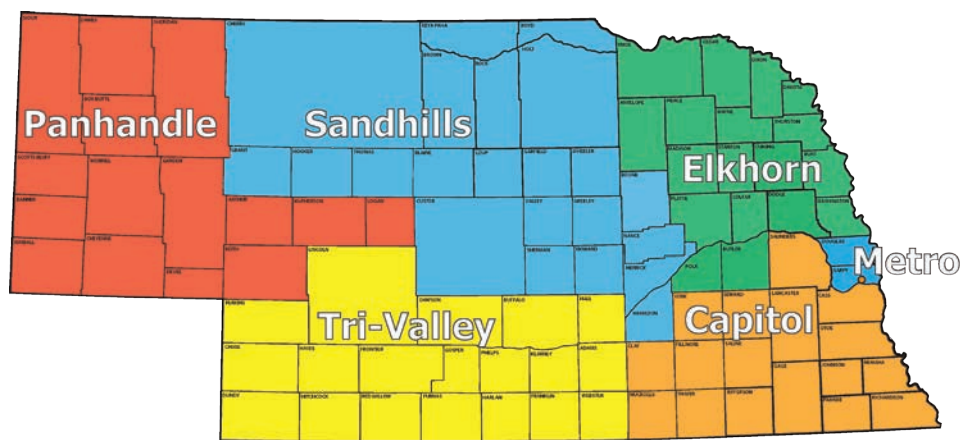
Aspiring Educator members will then elect delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly in statewide balloting following the March 27 Delegate Assembly.

### NEA RA At-Large Statewide Delegates: 1-year term

*Deadline to File: Sunday, Feb. 7*

*Elected during statewide online elections*

Delegates from **local associations with more than 76 members** must be



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

elected by secret ballot, according to federal statute.

Any active NSEA member is eligible to place his or her name on the statewide, at-large delegate ballot for NEA Representative Assembly by filing at nsea.org. Members elected as statewide delegates will be reimbursed for transportation, lodging and meal expenses. Depending on the final mid-January membership count, three to five delegate slots will be available to at-large candidates.

### NSEA-Retired Officers; Delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly and NEA RA (1-year terms)

*Deadline to File: Friday, Feb. 12*

*Elected during mail-in ballots in March*

Members of NSEA-Retired will use mail-in ballots in March to elect the following positions:

#### Board of Directors

- **Capitol District Representative** (3-year term)
- **Metro District Representative** (3-year term)

#### Delegate Assembly

- **Capitol District:** 4 Positions
- **Elkhorn District:** 3 Positions
- **Metro District:** 5 Positions
- **Panhandle District:** 1 Position
- **Sandhills District:** 1 Position
- **Tri-Valley District:** 3 Positions
- **At Large:** 2 Positions

#### Representative Assembly

- **Metro and Capitol Districts:** 1 Position
- **Other Districts and Out of State:** 1 Position
- **At Large:** 3 Positions

### NSEA Delegate Assembly At-Large District Cluster Delegates: 1-year term

*Deadline to File: Sunday, March 7*

*Elected during online election by cluster locals per district, March 14-23*

To elect voting delegates to NSEA's annual Delegate Assembly business meeting, **local associations with fewer than 26 members** are grouped in "clusters" in each of NSEA's six governance districts. For instance, all local associations in NSEA's Capitol District with fewer than 26 members will vote on a common set of candidates for delegates to DA.

The exact number of openings will be set after the membership count for 2020-21 is finalized in mid-January. There are approximately:

- **Capitol District:** 8 openings
- **Elkhorn District:** 10 openings
- **Metro District:** 1 opening
- **Panhandle District:** 6 openings
- **Sandhills District:** 7 openings
- **Tri-Valley District:** 12 openings

### NSEA Delegate Assembly Local Delegates: 1-year term

*Deadline to File: Set by each*

*Local Association*

*Secret ballot elections held at the local association level, with delegate names reported to NSEA by March 24*

Delegates from **local associations with 26 or more members must be elected by secret ballot**, according to federal statute. Presidents from those associations will be notified of the number of delegate representatives they may elect, based on their local association membership.

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### Enroll in NEA Easy Pay to Buy Interest-Free

Take advantage of buying now and paying later with a convenient installment plan and no credit check, interest, or fees. Shop from among more than 27,000 discounted products! Enroll at

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

### Meet Your Home, Office Needs at Office Depot

An organized and safe office or classroom makes your job easier!

Office Depot/OfficeMax offers NEA members discounts on thousands of items: save on every manner of school supplies; PPE such as hand sanitizers, masks, and thermometers; plus everything you need to keep your computer equipment running smoothly.

Plus, depending on how much you spend, you could receive an additional percentage off! Visit:

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

### Save on Your Next Car with End-of-Year Deals

Now is the time to get a great end-of-year deal on a new or used car when you purchase through the NEA Auto Buying Program. But hurry, these deals won't last long! Visit:

[www.neamb.com/autobuying](http://www.neamb.com/autobuying)

### Join Costco to Save on Brand-Name Items

From office organization and school supplies, storage solutions, and electronics, to health & beauty items, groceries and lunch box favorites, you'll find everything you need for a fresh start to the New Year!

NEA members obtaining a new Costco membership will receive a \$30 Costco Shop Card!

It's easy to join Costco. Go online sign into your account or register, and click "Join Now" to purchase your Costco Membership Activation Certificate. You will receive an email confirmation that includes your certificate, which you can then redeem at any Costco location to start saving! Go online at:

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

# Eight Health Resolutions You Can Actually Keep!

## These Small Changes Pave a Path to Wellness

By NEA Member Benefits

Improving your new year's wellness plan doesn't have to mean completely overhauling your routine. Experts claim small, simple changes are more likely to stick. These eight easy-to-implement ideas can get you started.

**1. Practice gratitude.** Taking stock of the riches in your life — big and small — can go a long way toward boosting health and wellness.

Research confirms that counting blessings rather than fixating on what's missing enhances wellbeing, especially if put in writing. A study in the *Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine* shows that women who wrote in a gratitude diary four times a week were happier and less stressed than those who didn't. You may not have everything you want, but you'll benefit from wanting what you already have.

**2. Break out the coloring books.** Once a playful childhood pursuit, coloring books have adult benefits, too. Coloring activates the same pathways in the brain as meditation and has even been found to change heart rates and brain waves. "It mimics some of the best features of mindfulness practices," says Caroline Miller, MAPP, professional coach and author of "Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide," who recommends adult coloring books to clients as a way to replace negative thoughts with positive images, unlock creativity, and allow a person to focus intently on choosing colors to make something beautiful.

**3. Delegate.** Whether at home or in the classroom, asking for help is key to preserving sanity. The key, say experts, is to capitalize on strengths. Is your teacher's assistant a pro at organization? Have her file student homework. Does your daughter love to cook? Ask her to make dinner twice a week. "Resilient people know how and when to tap into helpful resources," says Miller.

**4. Go high tech.** Whether your goal is to eat a healthful diet, stick to an exercise routine or get more sleep, a new crop of "apps" can help achieve your objectives. Americans are increasingly relying on technology to achieve health objectives with 34 percent reporting they

plan to use smartphone apps to support weight loss goals. Experts agree the accountability and visual progress report with such apps help motivate behavior change. MyFitnessPal, Cyclemeter and SworkitPro are a few examples.

**5. Create rituals.** Research shows rituals anchor you in the moment providing comfort and stability during times of chaos and also enhance your pleasure of positive experiences — even something as simple as eating chocolate. A study published in the *Association for Psychological Science* found that people who ritualized eating a chocolate bar rated the experience as more flavorful, valuable and worthy of savoring than those who chowed down. It doesn't matter which set of behaviors you perform as part of a ritual. You just have to refer to the specific set of actions as a "ritual" and participate.

**6. Wear supportive shoes.** Educators are on their feet nearly all day, which can cause foot, leg and back pain. But what if a simple switch — from women's high heels or men's pointy dress shoes to supportive shoes like Danskos — could transform your barking dogs into happy feet? Shoes that transfer weight toward the toe dramatically shift your gait and affect your balance. For extra cushioning, add insoles.

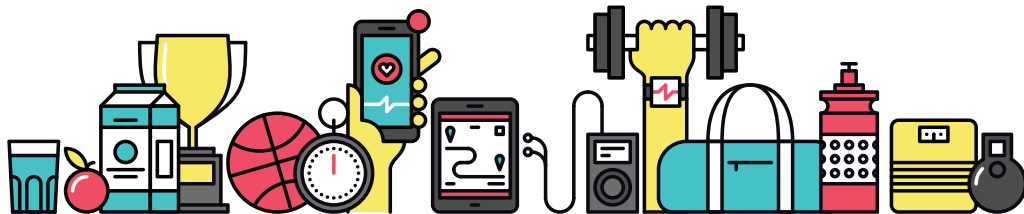
Look for deals on foot-friendly brands through NEA Discount Marketplace.

**7. Breathe deeply.** No matter where you are in your life or your workday, there's one powerful stress buster always at hand: your breath. Diaphragmatic breathing — inhaling so deeply that your diaphragm moves downward, your lungs inflate fully and your belly expands — can short-circuit the physiological reaction to stress. Sit tall, rest a hand on your lower belly, and feel your belly rise away from your spine as you inhale. As you exhale, your belly will fall as you release the air (and any toxins) from your lungs, then your rib cage and then your belly.

**8. Laugh.** Laughter, or anticipating a laugh (by, say, waiting for a punch line), may make you happier and healthier. Researchers found that joyous laughter can increase endorphins (those feel-good chemicals responsible for the runner's high), reduce stress hormone levels and boost your immune system.

Learn more on health and wellness at:

[neamb.com/family-and-wellness](http://neamb.com/family-and-wellness)



# Grant from NEA to Assist Young Teachers

## Funds to Continue Work of CORE by NSEA-R

NSEA-Retired received a grant of \$6,500 from the National Education Association to continue work of the organization's Call on Retired Educators (CORE) program, in support of active and emerging educators.

The grant dollars were supplied by NEA in response to NSEA-Retired's grant application titled Enhancing Growth and Enrichment Across the Spectrum of Education (from High School to Retired).

CORE supports active teachers, students in Nebraska colleges of education, and students in Educators Rising chapters in state high schools. For example, NSEA-Retired members provided a session at the virtual fall conference of Aspiring Educators, attended by more than 60 college students. CORE has also provided materials related to classroom management and materials that support social and emotional learning.

"Anything we do to assist young teachers or teachers-to-be as they gain experience or work toward a teaching certificate will benefit them, and thus, their students," said NSEA-Retired President De Tonack.

### Share the OLLI Experience

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln gives individuals age 50-plus a chance to enjoy a variety of classes. When the virus shut down in-person events and required online learning, it seemed complicated. OLLI staff and members had to learn new ways to teach and learn. Staff and members now see the benefits of virtual learning and its potential to reach beyond Lincoln.

At the OLLI website, you will find course offerings and how to become a member. Any Nebraskan can join a live-streamed course on Zoom or connect to recorded courses on Canvas.

A \$50 mid-year membership (good through July 31) entitles anyone to register for courses during the coming winter, spring and summer, as well as all Zoom courses. OLLI is for anyone with a curious mind or interest in learning. For more, go to:

[olli.unl.edu](http://olli.unl.edu)

### Don't Delay: File Soon

After an eventful 2020, this is a good year to start new – as a leader for NSEA-Retired!

There are many chances to seek a leadership role in NSEA-Retired, but don't delay: those seeking office will be able to file beginning Wednesday, Jan. 6, and must file by Friday, Feb. 12. To file, select 'Elections' at:

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

Open spots on the NSEA-Retired Board

## In Retirement, Rea's Focal Point is Art

After retirement, NSEA-Retired Treasurer Arlene Rea took on a "new adventure" – a hobby far removed from the curriculum specialty she enjoyed during her teaching career.

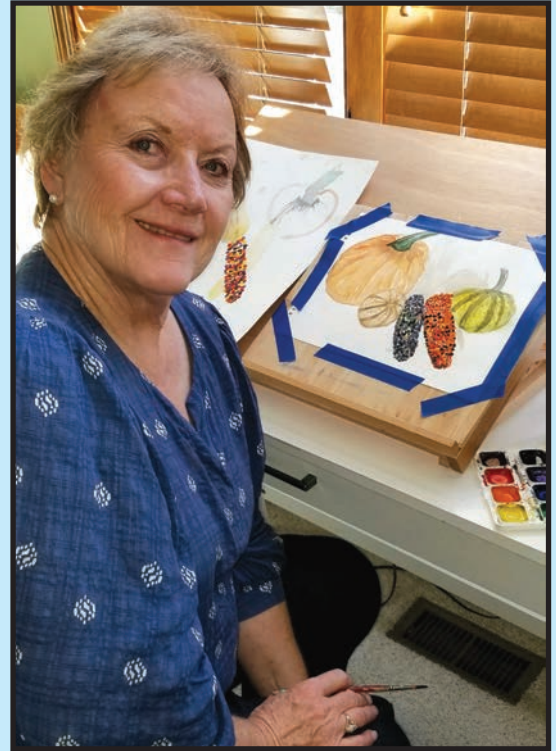
Rea retired after 30 years as a middle school math teacher and in March 2019 began painting with watercolors by attending weekly classes with friend, Barb Highstreet, a retired art instructor in Lincoln. Highstreet teaches weekly classes with 5 or 6 people around her dining room table.

In addition to her studies in Highstreet's classes, Rea began making handmade cards for members of the Lincoln Education Association Retired Board of Directors as she finished her term as president of that organization. Then, in December 2019, Rea decided to paint a community landmark from the hometowns of each of her three sisters. She had each framed and gave them as Christmas gifts.

Rea also had note cards made from each of the three paintings and gave them as gifts to sisters as well as friends. In January 2020, she decided to try painting animals, and painted a picture of her son's British Labrador for his birthday.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Rea began work on projects for each of her two daughters-in-law, with birthdays in April and May. The April birthday was based on a town they would have visited in Ireland in March.

Rea said she has always enjoyed trying new things. Up until last year, she had had no art training, not even in high school or college.



**The Artist and Her Art: Arlene Rea at her easel, with a work in progress.**

**Have you started a new adventure or hobby? Please share details with us by sending your story to NSEA-Retired President Dr. De Tonack at: [dtonack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtonack@neb.rr.com)**

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 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 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 now has 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 del-

egates also submit a 50-word biography.

### Governance/Lobby Day Goes Virtual

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

The event is Monday, Feb. 22, from 10 a.m. to noon. It will include opportunities to visit with state senators, get a legislative update and get assistance contacting senators. Members who register will receive and be reminded of the Zoom video link. After the event, participants will be asked to email, phone or write their senator. Registration opens Thursday, Jan. 7. Select the 'Calendar, Events & Registration' link at:

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

— De Tonack,  
NSEA-Retired President

# Logan View Numbers Grow Using Old-Fashioned Effort

## Membership Skyrockets with One-on-One Chats

In a year when every member matters and membership matters to every member, leaders at the Logan View Education Association used an old-fashioned, tried and true method to grow membership at the start of the year.

They talked to people.

"The biggest thing we did was to use one-to-one conversations," said LVEA President Denton Beacom. "A conversation was held with almost every teacher. This took place the first few weeks of school."

The result was a staggering 65 percent growth in membership from the end of the previous school year.

Beacom was in a unique position when he started at Logan View in August 2019. He left a teaching job with the Gretna Public Schools to teach fourth grade at the Logan View Public Schools. He was asked to serve as LVEA president before the school year's opening bell rang.

The association had 25 members at the start of the 2019-20 school year, and at the end of the school year in May, after retirements and other staff departures, membership had fallen to just 20 members.

"We started this year with quite a climb," said Beacom. "At my last check we sit at 33 members, which is the highest in quite some time."

The membership campaign started with welcome letters to all new staff in May. At an August orientation, LVEA leadership was given 10 minutes to speak to new staff. Beacom said leaders also took a different approach with messaging.

"I tried to use the line 'Stronger Together,'" said Beacom. "In conversations we listened to why people hadn't joined, or why they were no longer members."

"Really getting people to understand LVEA was the biggest messaging approach," he said.

Beacom believes in the good that comes from collective action.

"I believe membership is important because it shows a united voice," said Beacom. "As I said, 'Stronger Together.' It's important that all teachers work together for

the common good."

### NEA Seeks Inspiring Stories

Throughout this pandemic, America's teachers have gone beyond the call of duty to make certain that students get the best education possible, given the circumstances.

Now, the National Education Association wants to tell the stories behind those efforts.

The stories will help drive a student-centered narrative with state and national media, highlighting public education and student learning during COVID-19.

"We want to make sure members and parents see NSEA doing all it can to support and advocate for students as we continue to work through a spiraling pandemic," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

If you have an inspiring story of teaching and learning in your building or district, please consider sharing that story at:

[www.nea.org/share-your-inspiration](http://www.nea.org/share-your-inspiration)

### 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 new members 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 [nea.org/retired](http://nea.org/retired) and select 'Join Now' where the cost for memberships are found. Installment payments are available, depending upon date of joining. Once you join as a new member, you will receive a \$75 rebate from the NSEA-Retired dues.



Beacom

## Robert Beck was 68

Veteran Nebraska teacher and former Association leader Robert Beck died unexpectedly on Nov. 11. He was 68.

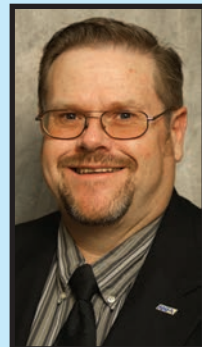
After graduation from the University of Northern Colorado in 1974, Beck took a job teaching fifth grade at Benkleman, starting and ending his career there. He eventually switched to teaching fourth grade and then Title I reading. Beck and his wife Jean moved to central Missouri in 2014.

In the 1980s, Beck became involved in Association work.

He served on the Tri-Valley District Board of Directors, and in 2000, was appointed to a vacancy on the NSEA Board of Directors representing teachers in southwest Nebraska. He served for 13 years.

In 2005, Gov. Dave Heineman named him to the Professional Practices Commission, a post he held six years. He retired in 2013, after 39 years teaching.

He is survived by his wife, Jean, two sons and their families, including six grandchildren and one great-grandchild.



Beck

## Shannon Sis, 56

Word has been received of the passing of Shannon L. Sis, 56, a paraprofessional for the Axtell Public Schools. Sis was an active member of the Association and served on NSEA's Education Support Professionals Task Force last year.

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

[rebecca.smith@nea.org](mailto:rebecca.smith@nea.org)

## Time Near to Request PAC Refund

NSEA's Political Action Committee (NSEA-PAC) is supported by voluntary donations collected with NSEA dues. Support for election of recommended candidates is provided by an annual contribution of \$15 from each NSEA member.

Any member may request a refund of those contributions for the current membership year. As an alternative to a refund, members may also direct that the \$15 contribution be directed to bond election and school ballot issues only.

Refund requests must be in writing to NSEA President Jenni Benson. Each letter must be individually composed and contain an original signature of the member. Photocopied, computer copies or e-mail messages are not accepted. Each letter must indicate whether all or part of the contribution is to be refunded, or whether the entire contribution is designated for statewide ballot issues.

Requests for refunds must be postmarked no later than Feb. 15, 2021. In order to efficiently use dues dollars, requests for refunds received by the due date will be processed and mailed in a single batch, after that date.

Send requests to Benson at 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508. Questions? Call NSEA's toll-free number at 1-800-742-0047.

## Speaking of Education

"If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, re-discovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in."

— *Rachel Carlson,*  
*Marine biologist,*  
*conservationist, author,*  
*1907-1964*

## NEA Resources Offer COVID-19, Cleaning Insight

As schools and campuses continue to juggle in-person and remote instruction during the pandemic, questions about the health hazards of cleaning and disinfecting products and protocols continue to arise.

Now, the National Education Association's Resource Library has more guidance on staying safe in your school and classroom in one of four publications designed to help educators during a pandemic.

NEA's new **Cleaning and Disinfecting in the COVID-19 Era** fact sheet provides details on the effectiveness and appropriateness of various cleaning and disinfecting strategies, how to recognize products that are hazardous, and how to assess when particular products or usages are inappropriate for schools. Find it at:

[bit.ly/nea-clean-disinfect](https://bit.ly/nea-clean-disinfect)

NEA also issued these papers recently:

■ **COVID-19 and the Workday:** This paper reviews how teachers might cope with extended workdays, new and complex instructional models and unanticipated workload issues.

[bit.ly/nea-covid-workday](https://bit.ly/nea-covid-workday)

■ **Tracking Student Attendance:** Districts are making thoughtful but varied decisions on how to track student attendance for virtual or hybrid instruction. It is critical for school and district leaders to provide direction on fair and just ways to "count" a student as present. Learn more at:

[bit.ly/nea-student-attend](https://bit.ly/nea-student-attend)

■ **Parent-Teacher Conferences and Parent/Guardian Meetings:** The pandemic requires that educators build on best practices that will strengthen the relationships and communication between the school, teachers and parents and/or guardians. Learn more at:

[bit.ly/nea-parent-teacher](https://bit.ly/nea-parent-teacher)

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

## Letter of Intent Date: March 15

### State Statute Sets Date

Just a year ago, a few administrators across Nebraska began distributing letters of intent before the Christmas holiday.

That distribution was extraordinarily early, as state statute does not require Nebraska's K-12 teachers to return signed letters before March 15.

Superintendents, in an effort to get a handle on next year's staff sometimes request that this year's staff state their intentions early, suggesting letters of intent be returned as early as Feb. 15 or March 1, or sometimes even earlier.

Letters of intent are important, and PK-12 educators should know their rights, said NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan.

State law allows school districts, on or after March 15 each year, to require certificated employees — teachers, counselors, speech pathologists, psychologists and others — to sign binding letters of intent and/or individual contracts. Such letters signify whether the teacher intends to return to employment in that district the next year.

In recent years, teachers have been asked to declare intentions early, said Guinan.

Some administrators have sent letters as early as mid-January. In rare instances the letters are sent out before Jan. 1, sometimes asking for a response within days.

Guinan advises that members not rush to sign, but be deliberate and use the time allotted by law. She said state statute is clear: "A school district cannot require teachers to make a commitment before March 15."

Failure to sign and return the letter by stated deadlines that fall on or after March 15 is a threat to a teacher's employment.

Guinan offers this advice: If administrators distribute such a letter/contract prior to March 15, and ask for its return prior to that date, a local association representative should fax a copy to Guinan or their assigned organizational specialist at the NSEA (1-402-475-2630). In the meantime, an appropriate response to the letter by teachers is "I don't know yet" or "I'm not sure."

Letters that ask for a signature and return on March 15 or on a specified date after March 15, are appropriate. In such cases, it is vital to sign and return it by the due date.

Questions? Call your organizational specialist, or Guinan, at 1-800-742-0047.

## Wanted: Proposals for NSEA University 2021

In the frigid weather of January, it is difficult to think about the heat of July, but that's just what planners for the third edition of the members-only NSEA University are doing.

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. While yet undecided, the hope is that the 2021 event will be in-person.

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>