

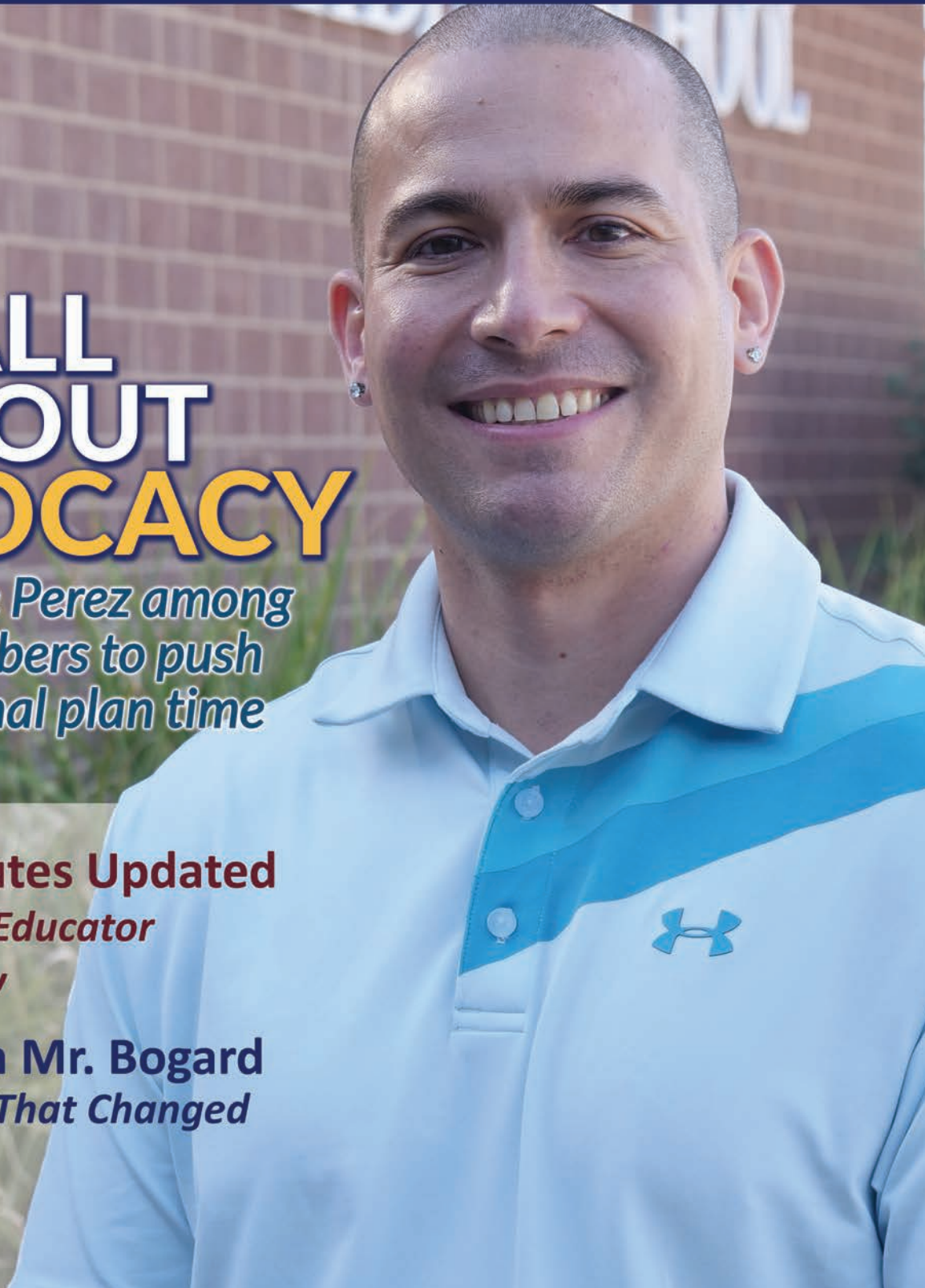
The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • November 2020

ALL ABOUT ADVOCACY

*Omahan Lee Perez among
NSEA members to push
for additional plan time*

- **State Statutes Updated**
*What Every Educator
Should Know*
- **Lunch with Mr. Bogard**
*'10 Seconds That Changed
My Life'*





THE VOICE

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American Education Week: A Celebration of Educators

'Observe the Best America has to Offer: Public Education for Every Child'

American Education Week presents every citizen with an opportunity to celebrate public education and honor individuals who are making a difference in ensuring that every student receives a quality education.

For 153 years, your Nebraska State Education Association has been fostering quality education for all. And perhaps not one of those years in the past has been as unsettling and as difficult as 2020. So this year is a perfect year to take a step back and celebrate the hard work of educators at every level.

"Custodians to cooks, secretaries to superintendents, teachers and everyone else in the school setting are working above and beyond to educate our children this year," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "There is no better time to observe the very best that America has to offer: public education for all."

Since 1921, NSEA has celebrated American Education Week along with other educators across the country. American Education Week will be celebrated this year during the week of Nov. 16-20, and will feature a day to honor teachers, parents, education support professionals and substitute teachers.

As a member of the NSEA, you belong to the parent organization – the National Education Association – that worked to found American Education Week nearly 100 years ago. The NEA has a schedule, artwork, handout cards and more online to assist with your celebrations. Here is the schedule for the week of celebration:

- **Monday, Nov. 16:** Kickoff Day. Across the country, schools will celebrate excellence in education by hosting kickoff events and activities.
- **Tuesday, Nov. 17:** Parents Day. On this day, schools across the nation traditionally invite parents into the classroom to experience what the day is like for their child.
- **Wednesday, Nov. 18:** Education Support Professionals Day: Celebrating the Education Support Professionals who keep schools running and students safe, healthy and ready to learn.
- **Thursday, Nov. 19:** Educator for a Day. In any other normal year, community leaders would be invited to experience the day as educators and experience the challenges of teaching and the needs of students, with the guidance of school employees.
- **Friday, Nov. 20:** Substitute Educators Day. Substitute educators play a vital role in the maintenance and continuity of daily education. On this day we celebrate their important contributions to education.

For details about American Education Week, each day's celebration, and for a look at the American Education Week artwork, go to:

www.bit.ly/aewnebraska

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



AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK 2020

On the Cover: Omaha Education Association member Lee Perez saw the power of advocacy reinforced recently in a conversation with the Nebraska Commissioner of Education. For the full story, turn to page 7.

Survive and Thrive



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“

*I believe we
cannot get past
the virus with
half-hearted
measures and
well-wishes,
hence the strong
stand.*

”

Most of us have taken a personality test of some kind or another in our lifetime. My experience is that such tests give insight into how and why we respond the way we do in the life situations we encounter. They can help us to “survive and thrive.”

In the recent, pre-COVID-19 past, I took both the Gallup Strength Finders and True Colors personality tests. Both assessments have helped me to better understand my temperament and my responses to the highs and lows that life throws my way. What none of the assessment developers likely gave much weight to in their final deliberations was how to navigate the high seas of life during a pandemic.

In an effort to provide smooth sailing, NSEA has in recent months taken a couple of unusual steps. More about those in a moment.

First, I’ll tell you up front that my Top Five Gallup strengths are positivity, woo, communication, input and belief. This seemingly endless pandemic has challenged each of my strengths and overwhelmed my weaknesses. Gallup says “People with the strength of positivity are always looking for, discovering and bringing the positive. They are light-hearted, generous, optimistic and enthusiastic.” That said, during this pandemic, I have been told I’m “too positive” and have a “toxic positivity.” Ouch!

Meanwhile, the True Colors assessment say my true color is blue.

“It can be said that when a person is feeling BLUE, they are experiencing emotional intensity and sensitivity to the dramas of life. The figure of speech referring to ‘True Blues’ takes on the meaning of friendship, helpers, ‘there when you need them’ individuals that will go the extra mile for others.”

My “blue heart” truly struggles as I hear the incredible stories told by members across the state. I want to fix all the ills of the world. Typical teacher, right?

We Are Pandemically Pushed

As our personality traits are now being pandemically pushed to the limit, our mental health becomes a real concern. You – all of you – have been constantly on my mind and in my thoughts. I’ve heard from and talked with many of you about the struggles and concerns of pandemic teaching.

There is not enough time to do all you are being asked to do, or to do it as well as you would like. There are not enough substitute teachers to fill the void when you or a colleague becomes ill. There is not time to take on some of the new duties and heavy burdens that educators everywhere are being asked to shoulder. We are living less in a “thrive” model and more in a “survive” mode. We

are working to help turn that around so that we can all survive and thrive. This is what we have done:

■ With “thrive” in mind, this past spring and summer, we encouraged Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt to consider an advisory committee of teachers. He agreed, and a committee of 15 has been meeting with Blomstedt monthly. There has been early success, with the commissioner in late September urging school districts to provide more plan time and professional development for teachers this year. Learn more in the cover story, starting on page 7.

■ With “survive” in mind, in October, we sent a letter to every Nebraska public school superintendent regarding each district’s responsibility to keep staff and students safe. When students are in our care, it is the educator’s responsibility – starting with the superintendent – to keep them from harm. The COVID-19 pandemic has made that work even more difficult.

Unrelenting

The catalyst for the letter was the State of Nebraska’s Sept. 1 Directed Health Measure (DHM), which undermined school safety by exempting school employees from some

quarantine requirements applicable to others in the community. The directive put children, their families, educators and communities at risk. Further, the DHM no longer required students to quarantine if face coverings were in use at the time of a close contact with a COVID-19 symptomatic friend or family member.

In the letter, which I signed, we said: “School districts that do not require students to wear face coverings are unreasonably and needlessly exposing students and staff to COVID-19. It is the expectation of the NSEA that school districts require the use of face coverings by all staff and students.”

We also advised that those districts that do not require the use of face coverings for students and staff, and/or that fail to tell employees when others in their school building remain in the building under the latest, relaxed DHM quarantine expectations, may subject the school district to potential legal action from a parent or student or school visitor who might become ill.

That letter, by the way, was copied to Blomstedt and to the executive directors of both the Nebraska Association of School Boards and the Nebraska Council of School Administrators.

This is a difficult time. The virus is unrelenting. One of my strengths is “belief.” I believe that we cannot get past COVID-19 with half-hearted measures and well-wishes, hence the strong stand.

We are with you. We support you. Long may you thrive and survive.



Southwestern Swing: NSEA Vice President Robert Miller, left, and President Jenni Benson, right, were in southwest Nebraska last month, stopping by Miller’s alma mater, Wauneta-Palisade Public Schools.

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EHA Rates Set for '21-22

In Difficult Year, Consortium Holds Rate Hike to 2.96 Percent

There will be an increase of 2.96 percent in Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) health care premiums for the 2021-22 school year, following action by the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) in mid-October.

The Blue Cross plan, used by nearly all Nebraska school districts, covers more than 80,000 lives.

Medical insurance rates for active employees will increase 3.06 percent and 4.5 percent for retirees. For the first time, rather than a one-time annual fee, special services fees will be included in premium rates for retirees. No dental rates will change, pulling the overall increase below 3 percent.

When the 2021-2022 plan year begins next Sept. 1, it will mark the 19th consecutive rate increase of less than 10 percent. The average annual increase over the past 10 years has been 4.1 percent.

"The COVID pandemic has resulted in significant disruption for our members," said NSEA Associate Executive Director and Comptroller Sheri Jablonski, who chairs the EHA Board of Directors. "It has also made it difficult to set rates for the 2021-22 plan year. Nevertheless, we are pleased we've been able to maintain our streak of nearly 20 years without a double digit increase in rates and, especially, to average just over 4 percent for the last decade."

EHA Rate Increases

A history of rates for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield plan, managed by the EHA Board of Directors:

2011-12:	0.00%
2012-13:	2.99%
2013-14:	6.40%
2014-15:	2.30%
2015-16:	1.91%
2016-17:	4.90%
2017-18:	7.99%
2018-19:	0.00%
2019-20:	4.99%
2020-21:	6.97%
2021-22:	2.96%

The only benefit change is an enhancement for non-HSA PPO plans. Member cost sharing for visits to counselors and psychiatrists will be eliminated as of Sept. 1, 2021.

"We believe it is important, particularly in these stressful times, to encourage our members to seek counseling if they feel anxious or overwhelmed. We did not want the benefit plan to discourage office visits by having the deductible applied first," said NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell. "We also encourage all school districts and EHA members to continue to follow CDC guidelines related to COVID in order to continue to mitigate claims and keep future increases low."

Jablonski said the low increase in rates is possible due to:

- The effect of the EHA's statewide wellness and health promotion program;
- A program designed to assist in the management of chronic diseases and emerging diseases;
- Holding the line on health and administrative cost increases; and
- Continued prudent management in the design and choices of benefit plans.

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

Lyons-Decatur's Timm is '21 TOY

Paul Timm, a science teacher in grades 7-12 at Lyons-Decatur Northeast Secondary School in Lyons, was named the Nebraska 2021 Teacher of the Year during a surprise award presentation in October.

Commissioner of Education Dr. Matthew Blomstedt gave the award to Timm, an NSEA member.

Other finalists were Michael Sandstrom of Chadron High School, and Sarah Staples-Farmer, Lincoln East High School.

Timm began teaching in Laurel, where he taught agriculture education. He has taught 7-12th grade science at Lyons-Decatur Northeast Secondary School since 2008.

Timm is an active member of the school community in the National Honor Society, as a Student Assistant Team Coordinator, and as a coach for the Quiz Bowl, cross country and track teams. Timm also represents Lyons-Decatur in the Nebraska Water Project multi-school collaboration, the National Geographic Districtwide Partnership, and helped to establish a research program in the district.

Timm, Sandstrom, and Staples-Farmer will be honored by the Nebraska State Board of Education at a February luncheon. Watch for more on each in the December edition of *The Voice*.



Timm

Miller: LB31 Study Raises Retirement Plan Concerns

The Legislature's Retirement Committee was told in September that the cost to merge the Omaha School Employees Retirement Plan with the statewide plan that serves other Nebraska education employees, as well as state patrol employees and judges, would cost an estimated \$1.735 million over the first two years.

That would include staff costs, legal, actuary, audit, professional services, supplies and other costs, according to a study by Linea Solutions Inc, a management and IT consulting firm.

The study was authorized by LB31, which was introduced by Seward Sen. Mark Kolterman in 2019. Kolterman chairs the Retirement Committee and said no action was imminent.

That did not stop Omaha Education Association leaders from voicing concern. OEA President Robert Miller said the OEA Board of Directors reviewed the 78-page study and found it lacking.

Those concerns, Miller wrote to the committee, centered on customer service, post-termination teaching in non-Omaha Public Schools, the substitute pool for OPS, and OPS teacher representation on the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Board of Directors, among other issues. Miller said plan members receive superb service

from the OSERS office.

"Any plan administration changes must provide the same – if not better – level of customer service for OPS employees," he said.

He also noted that OSERS plan members are not hobbled by a rule that bars participants in the state plan from substitute teaching for the first 180 days after retirement. "There is a severe shortage of substitute teachers and skilled school employees in Nebraska and these artificial workforce limits should not constrain the available Omaha metro area labor supply," he wrote.

Walta Sue Dodd, president of OEA-Retired, decried the merger cost and said those dollars would better be used to help members.

"The only result of moving plan administration to Lincoln is to provide less service to the members of the plan in Omaha and make the service more difficult and inconvenient for plan members to access," she said.

Kolterman said the OSERS plan losses during the Great Recession left it funded for only 65 percent of liabilities by 2016, while the state plan was at 90 percent. The OSERS plan today has an unfunded liability of nearly \$1 billion. The committee took no action.

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All About Advocacy

Omaha Teacher's Visit with Blomstedt Aids Push for Plan Time

In his roles teaching ESL for the Omaha Public Schools and as a building association representative for the Omaha Education Association, Lee Perez talks to a lot of people.

From those conversations and from personal experience, Perez knows that in this year of pandemic, teachers are struggling. He freely admits that he has struggled, too.

There are the difficulties that come with simultaneously teaching kids in the classroom and kids online, ever-changing safety protocols and the need to develop broader technology skills, among other issues. There is also the overall collective stress weighing on the school community as staff at every level work to move students forward while keeping every child safe.

All that is on top, says Perez, of shrinking blocks of plan time for teachers. Educators are spraying and scrubbing rooms between brief moments of teaching. They are giving up plan periods to fill in for ill or quarantined colleagues, as substitutes are in high demand or unavailable. In his conversations with other educators, Perez said teachers have told him they are tired and stressed. The weariness, he says, can be boiled down to a handful of issues.

"There is not enough time," said Perez. "Teachers are doing something they've never been asked to do. And there's not always a lot of clear guidance."

So, when he had the opportunity in late September to bend the ear of the state's top educator – Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt – Perez took on another role: that of advocate in search of more plan time for all Nebraska pre-K-12 teachers.

That opportunity also reinforced his belief that association membership and the association's advocacy is essential.

'A 12-Minute Talk'

Perez is one of 15 NSEA members serving on the Commissioner's Teacher



Now required: Omaha Education Association member Lee Perez is a firm believer in advocacy — and in the work of the Commissioner of Education's Teacher Advisory Committee, instigated by NSEA.

Blomstedt Urges Added Plan Time New Guidance Comes at the Behest of Teachers

Nebraska Education Commissioner Matt Blomstedt has issued guidance to school districts that will allow teachers more time for planning and preparation.

Blomstedt announced the pending guidance during an October 1 COVID-19 Town Hall hosted by NET News and issued the guidance the following day. Blomstedt told viewers he had heard from teachers and other school officials across the state that they are under significant pressure. Comments made during the broadcast echoed that sentiment.

"Teachers need time to plan, grade and prep for all learners, in and out of the classroom — two jobs wrapped into one," said NSEA member Joanne Catlett, Lincoln. "Teachers cannot provide the best education without time to prepare for it. We are drowning. Our health will begin to deteriorate before long."

Blomstedt proposes reducing the number of instructional hours to help reduce stress.

"I prefer high quality instruction, that teachers aren't overwhelmed, that students aren't overwhelmed, that we can balance those things out," Blomstedt said. Reducing instructional hours will not require an extension of the academic year. A 1918 law allows for flexibility during pandemics. The guidance includes "reasonable flexibility" for school systems and school districts as it relates to instructional hours. The guidance says:

- School systems and school districts may utilize instructional hours for additional professional learning, teacher and/or staff work time, or time for teachers to consult with parents/caregivers.

- Up to 12 hours per quarter (or 24 hours per semester or 48 hours per school year) may be used for those purposes.

- These hours should be used throughout the 2020-2021 school year and are not intended to shorten the semester or the school year.

Learn more about Blomstedt's guidance at: bit.ly/instructiontime

Advisory Committee, gathering virtually once a month with Blomstedt to talk about teaching and learning issues (see story, page 8). The committee usually

breaks into small groups, with Blomstedt flowing in and out of those breakouts.

"He happened to come into my session, and I ended up having a good 10- to

12-minute talk with him,” said Perez. “I just mentioned that plan time and professional development time needed to be extended and instructional hours need to be lessened. I said during a normal school year, I can see why high instructional hours would be important. But this is definitely an abnormal school year.”

Within a few days, Perez began to see social media notifications indicating that Blomstedt would announce guidance encouraging school administrators across the state to extend plan time for educators. On Friday, Oct. 2, Blomstedt formally proposed reducing the number of instructional hours, giving educators more plan time (see sidebar, this page). The commissioner’s guidance was just that – guidance. The decision to expand teacher plan time is up to local school officials. And while Perez can’t be certain that it was his conversation that drove Blomstedt to issue the guidance, he is pleased. He said Blomstedt listened and did not disagree.

“He listened, and that’s good,” said Perez. “Right now, we need leadership from the top guiding superintendents through this unknown territory.”

‘Exhausting’

Perez swims on a regular basis, and in the not too distant past ran 60 miles a week. Those workouts are nothing like the hybrid teaching – some kids in the classroom, some online – that he’s experiencing now.

“It is the most exhausting thing I’ve ever done,” he said.

His colleagues tell him they are experiencing similar exhaustion.

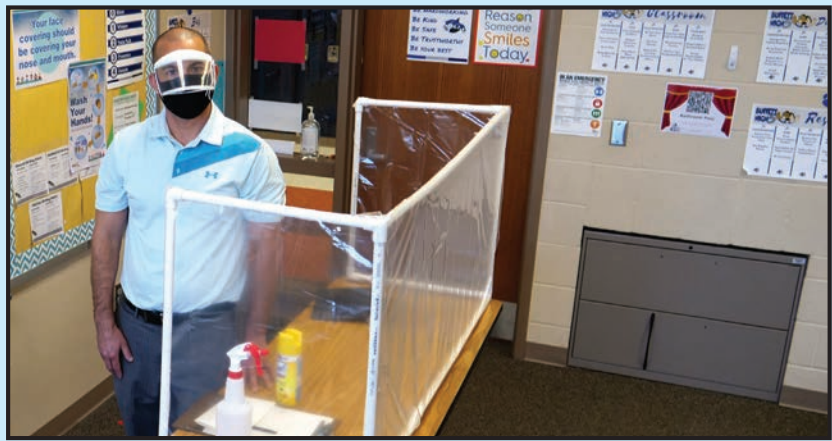
“I have never seen the teachers so tired and beat up,” he said. “They’re just at a loss for words, because it’s not easy to do what they’re being asked to do with the amount of plan time they’re giving us.”

“I’m just hoping that a lot of the superintendents are willing to grant us more plan time, more professional development because what we’re doing is an incredible amount of work.”

Perez fears a “mass exodus of teachers” if there is not some kind of relief.

“It is a fatigue that I have never felt in my life, and everybody is experiencing it.”

And, teachers are willing to work;



Safety First: Omaha teacher Lee Perez teaches behind a partition made by a friend from PVC pipe and plastic.

15 NSEA Members Advise Commissioner

Fifteen NSEA members serve on an advisory committee to state Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt.

During the early moments of the COVID-19 pandemic, in regular conversations with NSEA President Jenni Benson and Executive Director Maddie Fennell, Blomstedt mentioned he was working with an advisory committee of school superintendents.

“We asked whether he would be open to a teacher advisory committee, and when he agreed, we offered to help,” said Fennell.

NSEA put out the request, and more than 100 teachers responded. NSEA gave Blomstedt the names and demographics, and his office made the selection, making sure every region of the state, all grade levels and different disciplines were represented.

Fennell said that since the initial meeting this past summer, it has become expected that the committee’s work will be on-going.

The committee members:

Arlington: Jason Wiese

Bellevue: Tanishia Jacobs

Chadron: Renae Noble

Douglas Co. West: Rosita Krauel

Elkhorn: Suzy Renken

Grand Island: Michelle Carter

Lincoln: Megan Riggert

Millard: Jeffrey Sjuts

Norfolk: Kimberly Erickson

North Platte: Christina Simants

Norris: Mary Schlieder

Omaha: LaDeidre Jackson, Lee Perez

Springfield-Platteview: Andrew Hopp

Wilber-Clatonia: Jill Shea-Carpenter

administrators are trying to do what’s right.

“Teachers just need the time to do the work,” he said. “I want to advocate for the administration and superintendents, too, because I know they’re put in tough spots. Our superintendent has done a pretty good job, based on the circumstances.”

‘Fighting for Teachers’

Perez is pleased that NSEA encouraged Blomstedt to form the advisory committee.

“I can be a voice, not just for Omaha Public Schools. I’ve told people on the

committee that I want to be a voice for teachers all over Nebraska,” he said.

He also extended a personal thanks to Blomstedt for listening to the committee’s concerns. And he thanked NSEA for making the advisory committee possible.

“When people ask, ‘what are unions for?’ – this is what unions are for,” said Perez.

“I always encourage people to join the union. I tell them I am fighting for teachers. So if you’re a teacher, I’m fighting for your rights as much as I would fight for anybody’s rights.”

NEA Click & Save will be Discontinued in November

In response to valuable feedback from members, the NEA Member Benefits program will replace the NEA Click & Save program with the new NEA Discount Marketplace to give members a smoother, more rewarding online shopping experience.

NEA Click & Save will be available through November 19. Members with unused WOW Points in their NEA Click & Save accounts, should make sure to redeem

those points before they expire on that date.

Instead of earning points, members using the new NEA Discount Marketplace will earn cash back when shopping and saving on brand-name merchandise from more than 2,500 top retailers, online stores and local restaurants and shops.

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Grooming, Leave Bills in Statute

Teachers Hurt in Assault Affected by LB1080; 'Grooming' Policies Required in Each District

In a typical year, bills that pass muster before the Nebraska Legislature are signed by the governor and become law three months later – usually in July or August.

This has not been a typical year. With a legislative session split in two by a pandemic, senators finally adjourned in August, and new legislation enacted without an emergency clause takes effect on Saturday, Nov. 14.

The new bills include two of great importance to Nebraska teachers. The first benefits teachers hurt in the line of duty. The second will protect students from being sexually targeted by education employees.

The bills headline what was a mostly banner legislative year for the education community. Onerous school district spending caps were defeated, and positive changes were made to the operation of the troubled Youth Training and Rehabilitation Centers at Kearney and Geneva, benefitting the students and staff at those locations.

The most important changes, however, came with the passage of LB1186, and with LB1080, the survivor of six bills originally introduced to prohibit grooming of, and improper relationships with, students.

"These were significant actions by state senators," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "On one hand, we protect teachers. On the other hand, we protect our students."

Benefit for Injured Teachers Becomes Law

Perhaps the bright spot of the 2020 session was passage of LB1186, introduced by Lincoln Sen. Mike Hilgers.

The bill helps address a growing issue by granting up to seven days of injury leave, per occurrence, if a teacher or other school employee is assaulted and hurt while on the job. A December 2019 survey of members by NSEA found teachers who had been hit, scratched, kicked, bitten and punched by troubled students. Survey responses included pleas for additional services for

students, additional school staff and support from state and school district staff. Benson said LB1186 is a good first step.

"Currently, in most school districts, if a teacher is assaulted and requires leave from work to recover, they must use their own sick leave days," said Benson.

Under LB1186, the additional leave will be granted to accommodate recovery time, without a school employee having to use their already limited sick leave days. The employee will receive injury leave and

be paid their usual salary, in full, for such time as the employee is absent and unable to work as a result of such injury.

If additional leave is required, existing provisions of the Nebraska Workers' Compensation Act will apply. The injured employee will be entitled to utilize workers' compensation benefits and leave in accordance with the act. A school district may require confirmation from a physician regarding cause and length of time for which an employee is unable to work.

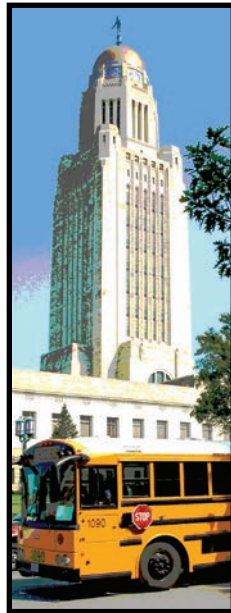
'Grooming' for Sex Prohibited

Omaha Sen. Steve Lathrop introduced LB1080, the flagship of a flotilla of six bills introduced by various senators to address the issue of improper education employee-student relationships.

Lathrop's bill sailed through, was approved on a 47-0-2 vote and signed by the governor. The bill defines "grooming" a student for an improper relationship and sets forth penalties for such action.

Grooming, according to the new statute, "means building trust with a student and individuals close to the student in an effort to gain access to and time alone with the student, with the ultimate goal of engaging in sexual contact with the student, regardless of when in the student's life the sexual contact would take place."

The new statute, which includes aspects of some of the other five proposals, also requires all public and private school districts to adopt, by July 1, 2021, a policy prohibiting grooming. Those policies will also include language prohibiting educational employee/student relationships for a minimum of one year after graduation of the student, or after the student ceases enrollment; examples of grooming; and a procedure for a school employee or a



Nebraska Legislature '20

SPED Financing, Water Under Study

Each year, state senators study issues so legislation can be written and introduced. Legislative Resolutions approved by the Legislature outline these studies. Among the education topics that are the subject of interim studies this fall are:

■ **LR337:** A study of which Nebraska-grown food products can feasibly be used for school meals and snacks.

■ **LR362:** An in-depth review of the financing of special education in public primary and secondary schools

■ **LR363:** A study to conduct an in-depth review of the financing of the public elementary and secondary schools.

■ **LR401:** A study to examine the enrollment option program.

■ **LR402:** A study to examine the effect of COVID-19 on the education of children in Nebraska.

■ **LR425:** A study to examine administrative costs of local school districts.

■ **LR436:** A study to determine whether Nebraska elementary and secondary students have adequate access to clean drinking water through the day.

Questions? Contact your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

student teacher or intern to verify the policy was received and understood.

The policy shall also include a procedure for reporting suspected grooming or other unacceptable conduct, and notification that violation of that policy could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Further consequences could include suspension or revocation of a teaching certificate.

'Appropriate Consequences'

In February, NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell testified to the Legislature's Education Committee in favor of LB1080.

"There is no acceptable reason that an educator in a PK-12 school district should be in a sexual relationship with a student, regardless of the student's age," she said.

"NSEA supports LB1080 because we believe it puts systems in place that will positively affect student safety while placing appropriate consequences on those who choose to violate the trust placed in them as a professional educator," she said.

For more details, contact your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.



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Andrea Hoopman
Science/Math Education, MS Ed
University of Nebraska at Kearney

COVID-Induced Contract Changes Should Always be Memorialized

Clear, Specific Language Best for Member Needs

Bargaining of your 2021-22 negotiated agreement this fall may be one of the more interesting and challenging in recent memory.

As the pandemic significantly altered learning and teaching conditions for the second semester of the 2019-20 school year, this current year has further revealed challenges none of us anticipated.

Specifically, adjusted workload and calendars created conflicts with negotiated agreements and forced school boards and administrators to work with the local associations on contract addendums, Memorandums of Understanding and other agreed upon changes and adjustments. Association leaders entered into those modifications to ensure that existing protections were retained, and new safety and health considerations were implemented.

School safety committees and other safe school reopening groups were faced with modifying school layout, instructional delivery and routine procedures in order to keep staff, students and families as safe as possible.

Negotiators, additionally, were challenged with modification of the

extra duty pay structure, professional development requirements and assorted leave and remote teaching issues, each of which should be memorialized in writing to ensure clarity in its application. The impact of the pandemic on the terms and conditions of employment resulted in a tremendous learning opportunity for the entire educational community and revealed how traditional systems and agreement

language can be upset by a virus.

As the current contract year began and virus exposures popped up in classrooms across the state, those who bargained clear language about how agreement-specific benefits and provisions meshed with board resolutions and federal action have smoothly ensured that members are protected physically and in terms of compensation and benefits.

If your members are struggling with the application of new agreement language, board resolutions and federal language,

like the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), or if your bargaining team has questions about best practices in negotiating around pandemic situations, they should contact their NSEA organizational specialist. NSEA's 18 organizational specialists are situated across the state and work closely with other NSEA staff to deliver the best possible service and advice on these types of situations, including those that may still



Gordon

Bargaining Calendar for 2021-22 Contract

Prior to 2011, local associations and local school districts would often consider bargaining a task to be completed during the summer months — as in weeks or days before the school year began. In some cases, bargaining for the new school year extended into that new school year.

No longer. LB397, introduced by Sen. Steve Lathrop, sets a firm schedule for bargaining activities. Here is the schedule:

- **Nov. 1:** Bargaining commences
- **Dec. 18:** Decision Day.
 - Talks must be complete; OR
 - Local must be willing to settle without legal assistance; OR
 - Local must notify NSEA organizational specialist of likely need to prepare for Resolution Officer hearing.
- **January:** Locals pursuing Resolution Officer work with NSEA to prep case or conclude bargaining on their own and ratify contract.
- **Feb. 8:** Statutory filing date for Resolution Officer proceedings
- **March:** Locals provide signed copy of new agreement to NSEA.

For more details, talk to your NSEA organizational specialist, who has a full copy of the recommended bargaining calendar.

emerge this school year.

Reach the NSEA organizational specialist assigned to your school district at 1-800-742-0047.

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Lunch with Mr. Bogard

or, How a 10-Second Conversation Changed My Life

Note: Growing up in Imperial, Phil Goddard was inspired by a band teacher who taught at Chase County High School for four years. “He was the reason I became a teacher,” said Goddard. “I’m in my 50s now, and hadn’t seen or spoken to him in 36 years. Last summer, I tracked him down and invited him to lunch.”

This is his story.

“The great teacher is not the man who supplies the most facts, but the one in whose presence we become different people.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

By Phil Goddard

I grew up in in the 70s and 80s in Imperial, Nebraska. It was, and is, the very definition of ‘rural’. My extended family had deep roots in the town and, now in my 50’s, I look back fondly and with pride at my experience there.

My two older brothers are brilliant. One has a doctorate in something called ‘number theory’ and attended MIT for a time. The other attended UNL, got an engineering degree and proceeded to take jobs working on the space shuttle program and the global positioning system in its infancy.

I had neither the aptitude nor desire for math or science in school. I struggled in both. Language was my forte and I excelled in classes that required me to write and speak (thanks, Mrs. Howard). But because my older brothers had been sharp in areas that involved numbers, I felt pressure from family and teachers to follow those footsteps.

I couldn’t. And, without evidence of superior athletic ability, I was a bit lost in this place that lacked, I thought at the time, an appreciation for anything other than strong sports teams and high grain prices.

Not a Milquetoast

In 1977, at the age of 10, I started school band playing cornet with an understated but very competent teacher, Mr. Bragg. I discovered I had a knack for the endeavor and quickly took to it in a “duck-to-water” sort of way.

The summer before my 7th-grade year Mr. Bragg left the profession and a new teacher would greet us the following year.

Mr. Bogard was a first-year teacher from the University of Wyoming. He was young, energetic, abrasive, funny, rebellious and would not let anyone question his authority, status or ability. From the moment the school year started, he exuded the personality of someone who demanded to be listened-to, reckoned-with and, in no uncertain terms, lived his life unapologetically. Band was certainly not going to be a Milquetoast, soft, artsy pastime.

For a young man in my situation at that time and place, nothing more important could have happened in my life. Participation in the program grew quickly. Other students obviously felt the same way and soon the program in that tiny town boasted over half the student body. By the time I was a freshman, 109 of the 205 students in our high school were in band.



Catching Up: Earlier this year, Mike Bogard and former student-turned-teacher Phil Goddard caught up over lunch.

Our marching band had gained an enviable reputation and was consistently winning competitions. My freshman year we would win first-place trophies adorned with statues of a drum majorette raising a mace and sporting a Q-tip hat.

A Life-Defining Moment

At the end of my freshman year, Mr. Bogard asked me into his office. The drum majorette was a graduating senior and he said that he was wanting to take a fresh look at the position. “Philip, I’m looking for a specific personality to lead the marching band next year. I like your attitude and confidence and I want you to lead the Band. Would you consider being the drum major?”

This 10-second conversation, unbeknownst to Mr. Bogard or me, changed my life forever.

In August, I was fitted with a new uniform, cowboy hat (our mascot was the Longhorns), and white gloves with Calvary-style leather gauntlets. I stood on a large wooden box to direct the band on the field. I led the marching and pep bands and had the authority to conduct as I saw fit. I had 100 instruments playing at once, under my direction... I was hooked (I recommend to the reader that you try it sometime).

I had found my calling and it was, in every sense of the phrase, life-changing. We won every competition that year. I took solos to contests and was part of amazing small and large ensembles. It was a very big year and, as former classmates can attest, so was my ego.

Music Becomes a Career

Mr. Bogard left at the end of that year. In hindsight, it was bound to happen. I was heartbroken.

His successor was a fine teacher in his own right and an impressive

gord

person, but it was never the same. Is it ever?

Even so, I continued making band a part of my life. I attended Hastings College and majored in instrumental music. I landed a job at a small school in Kansas to start my career. Like most first-year teachers I had lots of energy and made lots of mistakes.

I re-connected with my high-school sweetheart and left Kansas after two years. We were married and moved a couple of times. All the while I was, with two short exceptions, teaching band.

We eventually settled in Lincoln and the last 20 years I've been the band director at Milford Public Schools west of Lincoln — a rural school roughly the size of the one I attended in Imperial. The high school band has grown to well more than 100 students and we have nearly 100 percent participation in the elementary program. More than 1,000 Milford students have entered my classroom during my tenure. For someone who struggles with numbers, I'm happy with that one.

Realistic Expectations

In the spring of 2019, I received a flyer from our teacher retirement system and attended a seminar explaining my options as I enter the final stages of my teaching career. The whole experience was a bit of a psychological hit. This whole time I've just been working and loving it. Now, the profession is showing me signs of showing me the door.

During the entirety of my career, I've known that my time with Mr. Bogard — not seen since 1983 — has been the foundation of my career. Over the past three decades, I've periodically felt a strong urge to re-connect with the man who changed my life in every way.

Last summer, emboldened by the increasing speed of my professional clock ticking away, I made a firm commitment to contact him. I heard at one point he taught in Kansas, but that's all the information I had. However, with the use of today's modern, stalker-friendly technology, I was able to track down his son. When I had last seen the younger Bogard, he was a toddler. Now he was days from his 40th birthday and agreed to put me in touch with his dad.

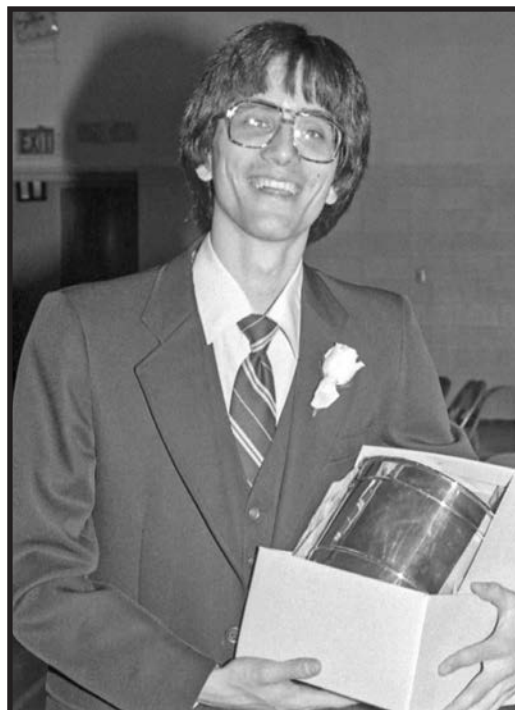
I had realistic expectations. Imperial was his first teaching job at 22-years old and it lasted four years. Would he remember the things I remembered? Probably not. Would he even remember me? Probably not. He was understandably guarded but eventually agreed to meet.

Life-Changing Occurrences

I arranged what I thought would be a short lunch near his home in Kansas. My plan was to simply tell him what had happened to me, tell him why, give him a heartfelt thank-you and get the check.

I arrived at the cafe first and got a table. Shortly after, in he walked... 36 years after the last time I saw him. The young, brash man I remembered was in his pepper-haired 60's now. Time had, as it does, changed both of us.

Our short lunch turned into something delightfully different. He listened to my memories of his time in my hometown and I listened with fascination to his journey these past 36 years. He had taught music in other places, become a school principal in later life and had recently retired.



A Final Bow: At left, Chase County High School band instructor Mike Bogard received a gift of appreciation following his final concert with the school band in 1983. At right, Milford High School band instructor Phil Goddard directs the MHS band in 2019. (Photo at left courtesy of The Imperial Republican newspaper.)

Throughout the conversation he kept apologizing for his younger self... the occasional bad language, tantrums and lack of diplomacy. I assured him, regardless of any youthful professional lapses, that at that point in my life I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

As we talked and enjoyed each other's company, I saw glimpses of the man I remembered. As I recounted occurrences that were life-changing and important in my life, his eyes would light up and he would fill in missing gaps. It was more — much more — than I imagined the best of circumstances would be.

'We All Have One Person in Our Lives...'

As the day grew into mid-afternoon, they kicked us out at closing time. I expected that to be the end of our meeting, but Mr. Bogard suggested we continue talking at a local coffee shop. They kicked us out of there at closing time as well. Then, as they locked the door behind us, we stood outside and continued our conversation. The whole event was extraordinary.

Since then, we check in with each other from time to time with updates and other memories that have popped into our heads. He emailed me this past January to let me know that he was reflecting on 2019 and that our meeting was on his list of highlights for the year. As this was my intention, I couldn't be happier.

Mr. Bogard was a huge influence. I'm sure I've mentioned him thousands of times in conversations with hundreds of students, friends and family. To him, I was a fleeting memory. To me, he was larger than life and uniquely responsible for all the joy, livelihood and professional success that I've experienced since I met him during my formative years in Imperial.

My guess is that we all have one person in our lives who made all the difference. I'm convinced that, more often than not, it's a teacher or coach.

For six hours on a hot afternoon in eastern Kansas I tried to make it clear to Mr. Bogard exactly what he meant to me and I had a great time doing it. If the opportunity presents itself, I would, in the strongest possible way, recommend that you do the same. If a person has made a life-changing difference to you and doesn't know it, invite your hero to lunch.

Make no other plans that day.



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A Shift from Compliance to Support and Development



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

New Teacher, Principal Performance Standards to Guide Equity, Data, Support

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

Never before has so much change in education happened in such little time.

Across the state, teachers and school leaders are placing themselves in front of their students and communities and feeling the effects of becoming “unexpert” and vulnerable. Now more than ever, educators need consistency in the supports and the opportunities for development to which they have access.

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards (NTPPS) are the foundation of a common language within standards that define an effective teacher and an effective principal in Nebraska. While these standards were developed pre-pandemic, the themes and expectations hold true in during-COVID-19, as well as in post-COVID-19 schooling. Certainly, the experience of school shutdown, teaching remotely, and returning to learning have exposed and magnified issues of equity.

The following themes, leveraged throughout the standards, provide an enhanced focus on equitable opportunities for each student.

■ **Statewide Common Language:** The NTPPS provide a foundation for communicating expectations for Nebraska’s teachers and principals and a framework for the alignment of statewide initiatives for the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), Educational Service Units (ESUs), Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), and other educational organizations. With the changing landscape in educational roles and responsibilities, courageous and necessary shifts toward consistency in expectations for effective teaching and school leadership within Nebraska will guarantee every student, regardless of demography, has access to effective educators.

■ **Knowledge and Skills for Effective Teachers and Principals:** The NTPPS provide a foundation for the communication of the knowledge and skills effective teachers and principals in Nebraska must demonstrate. This communication will clarify a district’s expectations for their educators, allowing them to continue to learn and grow professionally throughout their careers. In addition, this communication will increase the transparency of expectations within the NDE, ESUs, EPPs and other educational organizations, translating into increased alignment of the statewide system.

■ **Staff Support and Development:** The NTPPS provide a foundation for the establishment of

a system of support and development for educators.

When teachers and principals feel supported and have opportunities to grow within the profession, they are more likely to stay in education (Krasnoff, 2014). Consistent guidelines for effective teaching and school leadership will enhance communication and feedback, which leads to improved education for all students. Using common standards to collect and disaggregate data about teacher and principal performance will allow districts to make informed decisions on professional learning needs and placement of teachers and principals based on specific strengths and growth areas, thus improving the equitable opportunities for each student.

■ **Family and Community Engagement:** The NTPPS provide a foundation for the expectations of family and community involvement. By optimizing family and community involvement, districts welcome cultural differences, gain multiple perspectives, enhance opportunities for student and parental involvement, and align community initiatives with school initiatives, thus, improving equitable opportunities for each student.

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

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

Have questions about Educator Effectiveness? Ask them here:

<https://bit.ly/effectivedquestions>

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

education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness/

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

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

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



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
Network
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NSEA to School Districts: Face Masks are Mandatory

State DHM, Science, No Insurance Coverage Render Masks 'Minimum Standard of Care'

Top school leadership in every Nebraska district received a strongly worded letter from the NSEA in October calling on them to “require the use of face coverings by all staff and students” and putting districts on notice that ignoring that advice could lead to “significant legal liability.”

The letter was sent after it was learned that “several school districts do not require the use of face coverings despite medical recommendations and current Directed Health Measures (DHMs).”

Science and medical experts have advocated for mask usage; a spokesman for a school insurance pool program used by many school districts indicated COVID-19 liability is not covered; and a new state DHM altered the playing field.

NSEA’s letter to Nebraska superintendents noted the State of Nebraska’s Sept. 1 DHM adds educators to the list of “essential” employees, mandating that teachers and other school employees are “exempted from certain quarantine requirements if they, among other things, wear face coverings.”

And, students are no longer required to quarantine if face masks were used at the time of close contact with someone who is symptomatic or positive with COVID-19.

“Both exceptions,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson, “clearly focus on the presence of face coverings.” She urged leaders to

focus on science and safety for the sake of all in the school community.

“The science and data are clear: The spread of COVID-19 is minimized when *everyone* wears face coverings. School districts that do not require students to wear face coverings are unreasonably and needlessly exposing students and staff to COVID-19,” said Benson. “Lack of action in that regard also exposes the district to legal liability.”

The letter reminded leaders that in September, the Omaha World-Herald reported the global insurance company that provides insurance for more than 170 Nebraska school districts through an insurance pool, added an exclusion for coverage of communicable diseases. The president of that insurance pool advised that school districts “should make sure they have a good COVID-19 plan and pay attention to health department directives.”

She said “the NSEA considers notice of a quarantine exception and mandatory face coverings as a minimum standard of care necessary to satisfy every school district’s legal duty to protect health and safety.

“School districts that do not require the use of face coverings for all students and staff, or that fail to notify employees when others in their work environment remain in the school building pursuant to DHM quarantine expectations, subject the district and those responsible, including administration and board members, to potentially significant legal liability.”

The source of liability could come from parents, patrons, vendors or others with school building contact.



NSEA Partners with UNMC, NASB on COVID Posters

The University of Nebraska Medical Center’s COVID-19 Back-to-School Playbook says that “All children in grades 3-12 must wear face coverings – with medical caveats – as well as teachers, staff, and volunteers. If tolerated, masks should be used for children between 3 years of age and third grade.”

UNMC developed two posters, one aimed at teens, shown above, the other aimed at younger children, encouraging the wearing of masks in school.

NSEA has partnered with the UNMC and the Nebraska Association of School Boards to distribute the posters at no charge. The posters are available for download and printing on the NSEA website.

To find the posters, click on the COVID-19 link on the NSEA homepage and look for ‘UNMC poster.’ The NSEA website is at:

nsea.org

Ag Sack Lunch for Fourth-graders Kicks Off New Year

The Ag Sack Lunch Program, designed to increase agricultural awareness among Nebraska fourth graders and their families, has returned for an 11th school year.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, however, changes have been made. Many classes will not make the trip to Lincoln this year to tour the State Capitol as part of their curriculum. For that reason, the Ag Sack Lunch program will offer schools the option of receiving virtual presentations via Zoom. The virtual tours will focus on the importance of agriculture to the state economy.

“We don’t want the pandemic to prevent us from visiting with fourth grade students about the importance of agriculture in Nebraska,” said Karen Brokaw, Ag Lunch Program coordinator.

Registrations are being accepted for both fall and spring and for

virtual or in-person State Capitol visits, said Brokaw. “It is important teachers make their reservations as soon as possible to ensure availability,” she said. Reservations can be made at:

www.agsacklunchprogram.com

“Participating teachers continue to tell us how their students learn so much from the presentations,” said Kelly Brunkhorst, Nebraska Corn Board executive director.

Since the first program in 2010, more than 46,000 students have participated. The program provided 5,250 lunches last year.

Program sponsors are the Nebraska Corn Board, the Nebraska Soybean Board, the Nebraska Pork Producers Association, Nebraska Beef Council, Midwest Dairy and Nebraska Poultry Industries.

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Plan Now for DA No. 160

New: Deserving Administrator to be Honored

The school year is well underway, but it isn't too soon to begin planning for April 2021 and NSEA's 160th Delegate Assembly.

This year's event will include a new feature: the Administrator of Excellence Award.

The award was proposed at the 2019 Delegate Assembly and will be delivered for the first time in 2021. It will honor "an administrator that strives every day to get students and staff to be successful." Details can be found on the NSEA website with other Delegate Assembly awards (see box).

For the uninitiated, Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting. Members from across the state, representing local associations large and small, are elected to attend and manage the business and set the future course of the Association.

Inspiring speakers, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are all part of the Assembly action and work.

While last year's event was virtual and did not include the robust professional development of the previous two years, it is hoped that the 2021 event will return to an in-person format. Regardless of format, a Delegate Assembly 101 session will be offered to assist delegates in fully understanding and experiencing their role in the Assembly.

Also in store at Delegate Assembly 2021 is an election for a representative of the Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee representative on the NSEA Board of Directors.

NSEA's first meeting was held as the Nebraska State Teachers Association in Brownville on Oct. 16, 1867, just months after Nebraska gained statehood. NSEA is the state's oldest professional association and has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year since, and in some cases, twice in a year.

The 2021 Delegate Assembly is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, April 23-24. The format of the meeting (virtual or in person) will be determined by the NSEA Board of Directors in December.

To make your interest in serving as an elected delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty

Recognize Excellence

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving 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:

www.nsea.org/delegateassembly

Members are eligible for:

■ **Early Career Educator of the Year:**

Nominate those in their first 5 years of teaching.

■ **Award for Teaching Excellence:**

Honors a teacher for long-term excellence.

■ **Education Support Professional of the Year:** Honors an ESP who has excelled at work.

Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.

NSEA members are also eligible for:

■ **The Great Plains Milestone Award:**

Honors an individual/group for promoting human and civil rights.

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

■ **Local Public Relations:** Honors local associations for outstanding internal communication.

Also to be presented:

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

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

Climate Change Tackled by UNL Journalists

In-depth Study of Change in Nebraska

From floods to drought, blizzards to heat waves, there is mounting evidence that climate change is affecting Nebraska. As carbon emissions increase and the agricultural industry becomes more vulnerable, one could argue this is a good time to educate Nebraskans on climate change. Climate Change Nebraska, a student-led depth reporting project at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is attempting to do just that.

Sponsored by the College of Journalism and Mass Communications at UNL, a yearlong depth-reporting project is examining both the problems and solutions associated with climate change. Students from all corners of the University have assembled to form a team of energetic journalists. These students are on a mission to educate Nebraskans about the reality of climate change in their own state.

From eco-anxiety to the effect on public health, the first semester focused on the effect of climate change on Nebraska's agriculture, livestock, water, politics and wildlife. The fall semester switched its focus to the range of potential solutions – including solar and wind energy, regenerative farming techniques, a carbon tax and preservation of Nebraska's precious but vulnerable water supply. Fifteen students, drawn from seven different colleges and 12

different majors, each were assigned a specific story and given 16 weeks to thoroughly explore all sides of the complex issue.

The student journalists of Climate Change Nebraska pride themselves on fair and balanced reporting. The Politics of Climate Change, written by Lauren Dietrich, has received high praise for its fairness. Climate Change Nebraska believes that showcasing all sides of an issue is the key to credible journalism and crucial to understanding the issue.

"These students, while learning how to tell accurate, fact-based stories, are providing a real public service and connecting real Nebraskans to climate change," said journalism professor and project co-director, Jennifer Sheppard.

While the articles outlining potential solutions are currently in progress, all articles describing the problems associated with climate change in Nebraska can be found on the website. The stories discussing solutions will be published in the spring of 2021.

The over-arching goal of the project is to both inspire and educate the public in all relevant climate change issues. Climate Change Nebraska hopes that their work can be implemented in classrooms across the state as an educational resource for teachers and students. Educators are encouraged to use this resource as they see fit. To read more about climate change in Nebraska, visit:

climatechangenbraska.com



Democracy Speaks: Members of the Loup City Education Association sponsored and hosted a school board candidate forum in early October, with eight of the 10 candidates attending. LCEA members, standing, from left, are: Lonnie Tverdik, Tony Kapustka, Amy Hostetler, Secretary Jenny Gydesen, Lisa Harrington, Dusti VanSlyke, Heidi Krolikowski, Kyle Kowalski, Scott Friesen, President Elizabeth Augustyn, Mike Kaminski (hidden), John Heil Jr., Vice President Sarah Norseen, Lindsay Gappa, Deb Miller, Camie Badura and Jan Peters. Four of the eight candidates who attended are seated in front.

Loup City Finds Success with Candidate Forum

With five of nine seats on the local school board open, and with 10 candidates seeking the five seats, what's a local association to do? If you're the Loup City Education Association, you host a candidate forum!

"This is a tough year to add more to our plates. It's been a doozy of a year, teaching wise," said LCEA President Elizabeth Augustyn. "But because this was new for us, we wanted it to go well. We really worked to make it a positive experience."

Because there had been much interest in school-related issues in the district, Augustyn said LCEA members sought to provide a calm

and informative approach to the forum, with the event more of an exchange of ideas than a debate.

"We felt we needed to show our students, and our candidates, a positive event," she said. Members also sought to share that teachers have interests and concerns about what is best for the school district.

Candidates were provided the questions ahead of time, and the LCEA later submitted a summary of candidate answers to the newspaper for publication. About 50 local citizens attended the event. All-in-all, it was a positive event, said Augustyn. "No one left with an ax to grind. The feedback was good."

Brain Injury Group Offers Concussion Management Tool

Half of Nebraska teachers responded to a 2018 survey that they did not know how to manage concussions in the classroom. A like number noticed an academic decline from students who sustained a concussion or head injury.

Yet finding a way to offer differentiated instruction to a concussed student can be a challenge, especially with full classrooms and limited teacher free time.

Most concussions (80 percent) resolve within a four-week time frame if the concussion is quickly and properly managed both in and out of the classroom.

Now, the Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska offers the Teacher Acute Concussion Tool (TACT) – a concussion management email based on each teacher's unique responses to a brief questionnaire about their teaching style. Soon after survey completion, an email is delivered to the teacher outlining recommendations for environmental and academic content adjustments. No student details are shared. The survey only seeks information on the teacher's teaching style for that class.

An email arrives each week for four weeks, with clinical, research-based best practice for concussion "Return to Learn" (RTL) management. "Get Schooled on Concussions" tips are part of each email.

The Brain Injury Alliance of Nebraska leads the Nebraska Concussion Coalition, which implements action steps to improve concussion awareness and outcomes. The coalition provides the statewide subscription for Nebraska teachers to 'Get Schooled on Concussions' and TACT.

Statewide partners include the Nebraska Department of Education, NSEA, Nebraska Council of School Administrators, Nebraska School Activities Association, Nebraska ESU Coordinating Council and the Nebraska Association of School Boards. Teachers wanting to learn more or to utilize TACT can use the

Are you ready to Get Schooled on Concussions?

Enhance your Return to Learn (RTL) plan with these **FREE** easy-to-access tools

2020 - 2021 subscription for your state educators made possible by

Brain Injury Alliance
NEBRASKA

Contact us to find out how to start using your **FREE** access today!

Access to over 30 individually crafted lessons on how to support students in the classroom and with protracted recovery.

4-week specific classroom strategies delivered directly to your inbox tailored to your teaching style, content area, environmental and student factors.

Video tutorials on the academic support of concussion management in elementary, middle and high schools.

Tip Sheets

Teacher Acute Concussion Tool (TACT)

Videos

Get Schooled on Concussions

password TACTnebraska2020 at:

getschooledonconcussions.com/Nebraska

For more, reach BIA Executive Director Peggy Reisher at 402-890-0606, or at:

peggy@biane.org

NSEA Needs to Get Out of Politics!



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“

We are in constant contact with colleagues around the country, our legal team and decision makers across the state as we seek to find answers to increasingly complex problems.

”

As a junior at Creighton University in 1985, I joined the Student Education Association of Nebraska. When I became a state student officer that following spring, advisor Mary Ann Adams made us memorize two things every NSEA member should know: that the toll-free number to NSEA is 1-800-742-0047, and these words: “Every decision in education is a political decision.”

It still surprises me when I answer a call or email from a member who is emphatic that “NSEA shouldn’t be involved in politics. Just work on getting more money for salaries and protecting our jobs!”

Well, those two statements are mutually exclusive. We cannot accomplish the stated goals without political involvement. Consider these facts:

- Educator salaries are bargained. Bargaining was established in statutes passed by our state legislature.

- Bargaining is affected by your school district funding. That funding is affected by the Tax Equity & Educational Opportunities Support Act (TEEOSA), the school finance formula for Nebraska public schools passed by our legislature.

- Nebraska teachers have continuing contracts, due process and other rights established by laws passed by our legislature.

Carefully Balanced Teams

Forty-nine elected state senators pass laws as members of the Nebraska Legislature. Each of those senators have opinions on a variety of issues but NSEA recommends senators based only on their opinions and votes affecting public education.

Every candidate who seeks NSEA’s recommendation must complete a questionnaire regarding issues that affect education. The questionnaire includes questions such as:

- “If elected, what is your primary initiative to ensure that all Nebraska students have access to a well-funded, quality public school? Please give details.

- “Will you support existing defined benefit retirement plans for school employees?”

- “Will you support using public funds to provide parents with vouchers to pay for their child/children’s private K-12 school tuition?”

Each candidate must then meet with a team of members to discuss their views on education. NSEA interview teams are carefully balanced among Republican, Democrat and Independent members who live or work in the candidate’s district. The team comes to consensus to recommend a candidate, with that recommendation sent to the NSEA Board of Directors for approval. Only then does NSEA use political donations, along with the sweat equity of members, to support these member-recommended candidates.

Could We Lose Collective Bargaining?

If NSEA does not help to elect pro-public education candidates, then candidates who do NOT support public education are elected. We will lose collective bargaining, as happened in Iowa. We will soon have charter schools, voucher programs and tax credit schemes draining funds from public schools, as is happening in more than 47 other states.

I know being involved in politics isn’t easy. Espe-

cially now – it’s beyond ugly.

But educators must be at the table with elected decision makers, because if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu! We only get a seat at that table by helping elect those who respect and value the educator voice in decision making.

An Excruciating Year

This matters now more than ever. I know this year has been excruciating. Remote learning, hybrid learning, synchronous learning – these terms have become as despised as “No Child Left Behind!”

Nebraska is proud to be a local control state, especially when it comes to policy making at the school district level. Our colleagues in other states have filed lawsuits during COVID and their “relief” has become exactly what Nebraska already has: decision making at the local level.

Our decision makers are publicly elected school board members. They are making decisions about schools opening and closing, remote learning, adding teacher work time, appropriation of COVID funds, masking and social distancing policies and much, much more.

The fact is that *elections matter!* Recommending and supporting candidates who support *you* matters!

Much has Been Accomplished

As we work to elect more pro-public education candidates up and down the ballot, we are working, literally day and night, to seek relief for educators. We are in constant contact with colleagues around the country, our legal team and decision makers across the state as we seek to find answers to new, increasingly complex problems.

We established a Teacher Advisory Committee to the Nebraska Department of Education (see page 7); protected teachers’ Family and Medical Leave Act rights; secured Families First Coronavirus Response Act benefits; assisted teachers with mental health needs; increased mental health benefits and wellness programs available through the Educators Health Alliance; conducted Facebook events, U.S. mailed and email information to members to provide timely and important information; lobbied for increased COVID funding for schools and community food providers; provided special training by our legal team to our NSEA field staff as they addressed individual member needs; met with local leaders to brainstorm solutions to a myriad of concerns; produced Teacher TV and other curriculum content; worked with local media outlets to provide updated information and the educators’ perspectives to the public; and produced caboodles of helpful resources for you that are available at:

nsea.org/COVID19

We are working with senators and others to introduce legislation in 2021 to address educator and student needs during this pandemic and expand the authority of public health agencies to enforce directed health measures.

Just as you work to meet the needs of every student, NSEA is working to meet the needs of every Nebraska educator. You haven’t stopped. Neither will we.

Remember: all our jobs will be easier when we elect candidates who will stand with us to face these challenges.

The CORE Issue: Support for Active Teachers

Retired Members Can Offer Aid, Support to Active Teachers

As active teachers struggle with the challenges of teaching during a pandemic, many retired Nebraska teachers are seeking ways to be supportive of their active educator colleagues as they meet those challenges.

NSEA-Retired President De Tonack said the organization's Board of Directors supports the concept and calls it CORE – Call on Retired Educators. Laura Parson, a member of NSEA-Retired from Cass County, has been thinking along that same line.

"My brain has been busy thinking of ideas and so far, I have been able to organize some ways to support the staff of Conestoga Elementary School in Murray, Nebraska," said the retired third and fourth grade teacher.

Parson has organizing experience. She was a Conestoga Education Association member for all her 34 years in the district and was CEA vice president and secretary at one time. She is now a member of both NSEA-Retired and NEA Retired.

First, Parson said she contacted the principal and asked how retirees might help. Parson offered specific ideas and the principal approved or disapproved of those ideas, keeping in mind his staff, the school, and current procedures.

"I'm sure that things will be handled differently for districts with multiple buildings, sites, etc. So, starting with the principal is essential, in my opinion," said Parson. "If the principal is not on board, then I'd encourage a retired teacher to contact a current teacher that they know and 'adopt' that teacher to help throughout the year."

Parson also said she asked the principal for suggestions and established an open line of communication, sharing with him a desire to be of assistance any way that retirees could. She worked with the current Conestoga Elementary principal in the last of her 34 years in the district, and familiarity has made the process easier than other retirees might encounter in other districts.

She also contacted several colleagues who had retired from her building at Conestoga. No one refused to help, and all were very willing to brainstorm ideas to help active teachers. There are now 13 Conestoga Elementary retirees involved in this project.

"I'm assuming that this method is easier in a small district and would likely need to be handled differently in districts like Lincoln and Omaha, although it's not impossible," said Parson. "Finding at least one person for a school to take on this project and



A Portrait: Retired from the Conestoga Public Schools, Laura Parson, left, has worked with other Conestoga retirees to support still active teachers in the district. Parson is pictured with her daughter, Jess Hohulin, who lives and has taught voice and piano in South Bend, IN.

has a passion for teachers and schools in their current situation will help get the ball rolling quickly! If an alumnus of the school that is known to be involved in community projects or philanthropic causes, this person may be one to recruit to the project. Many businesses in small districts are struggling to stay afloat. And although they are often willing to donate to the needs of the local school, they may very well be strapped financially. But they could be a good source of names of individuals that could help."

Here are examples of what the Conestoga team has done so far:

- Sent encouraging notes and cards monthly to the staff or individual teachers. The principal can alert the retirees if a certain staff member needs additional support.
- Purchased gift cards from area restaurants or grocery stores for the principal to give out to staff through random drawings, or he can give to someone who needs encouragement or is especially struggling. "Again, we're leaving him with the discretion to use these gift cards as he sees fit," said Parson.

- Made extra masks for staff members.
- Provided funds for supplies needed to assist the staff members. The principal suggested donating money to purchase face protection brackets that are to be worn un-

der masks as they will make breathing easier for those wearing them.

- Provided prepackaged snacks and candy for the staff.

- Provided pens, markers, bookmarks, decorations, small gifts, etc. to be used in the classroom by the staff or the students

Tonack said other retired teachers across the state are working to assist their active colleagues.

"The Lincoln Retireds sent a note of encouragement to district teachers. Nancy Bishop, state resident of the Alpha Delta Kappa teachers' honorary is planning to read to first grade English language learner students using Zoom," she said.

"We encourage you to call other retired teachers and organize similar efforts in your area," said Tonack. "No effort is too small."

An Opening at OLLI

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, otherwise known as OLLI at UNL, is a membership-based lifelong learning program for adults 50 and older.

There is an opening in the OLLI executive director position. The job listing is at:

olli@unl.edu

— De Tonack,
NSEA-Retired President

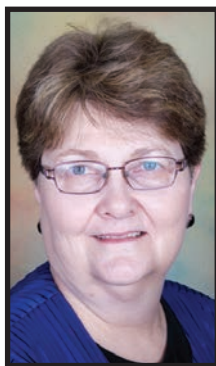
Elwood Honored in Omaha

Schools, Districts Cited for Excellence, Wellness

Former **Millard** special education teacher and department chair, and retired NSEA organizational specialist **Lynne Elwood**, was honored by the Douglas County Democrats with the Anne Boyle Lifetime Achievement Award.

Elwood taught at **Macy** and then Millard for 14 years. She held numerous association posts, including four years as Millard Education Association president.

In 1998, Elwood joined NSEA as an organizational specialist and worked with members in that capacity in north central Nebraska and then at Millard for several years. She retired in 2014.



Elwood

Members of nine NSEA local associations can be proud that their institutions were recognized last month with a Governor's Wellness Award.

The Sower Award honors workplaces that establish quality wellness programs. The Grower Award cites organizations that show significant improvement in employee health behaviors. Earning Sower Awards were **Waverly Public Schools, ESU No. 1, North Bend Central Public Schools, and Shelby-Rising City Public Schools.**

Earning Grower Awards were **Boone Central Schools, ESU No. 6, ESU No. 9, Seward Public Schools** and the **University of Nebraska at Kearney.**

Members in three Nebraska school buildings can cheer: their sites have been named National Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education.

Honored were **Pyrtle Elementary in Lincoln, David City Elementary and Standing Bear Elementary in Omaha.** Recognition is based on a school's overall academic performance or progress in closing achievement gaps among subgroups of students.

Will Aviles, president of the **University of Nebraska-Kearney Education Association**, was a panelist on a National Education Association Local Presidents' Training program virtual discussion series on September 16.

The session allowed new local presidents to connect, collaborate and find community. Aviles, in particular, shared ideas about how to conduct productive virtual executive board and building or department representative meetings.

Rachel Ahrens, a member at **Omaha Northwest High**, has been selected as the Air Force Association/Rolls Royce 2020 National STEM Teacher of the Year.

Selectors cited her education leadership, especially her work interweaving STEM and civic advocacy to empower students to make a difference in their community.

The prize comes with \$3,000, a diamond pin and a one-year seat on the Air Force Association Aerospace Education Council.

Grafton Joins Staff at NSEA Headquarters

Former intern Emme Grafton has rejoined NSEA as associate staff for collective bargaining.

Grafton earned an International Baccalaureate degree at Lincoln High and an honors program degree in English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, before moving to New York City.



Grafton

There, she worked in theatre, opera, dance, film and publishing, working several jobs at once. Her 'coolest' job was as a warehouse associate for a film/TV company specializing in props.

She returned to Nebraska, became certified to teach English and moved to South Korea where she discovered that she loved teaching — and was good at it. She returned to Nebraska, worked at NSEA as a government relations intern, while holding a side job teaching children in China how to read and speak English. After the pandemic hit, Grafton began work on a master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Grafton fills a vacancy created when Natalie Thomason left to pursue opportunities in Colorado.

Time is Now to Apply for Belz/Lynch/Krause

Stipend Dollars Honor Former Leaders, Given for Staff, Association Improvement

Good teachers always seek to improve their skills. NSEA makes that easier with funds from the Belz/Lynch/Krause Educational Grant Fund.

Grants are awarded for projects related to improving a local association; development of instructional materials; or for staff development for individuals of a local association. Eligible are any NSEA member; group of NSEA members; or any NSEA local association.

The application must include a project abstract, not to exceed four typed pages, including: need; how the project will address the need to relate to professional growth goals; project description; timeline; a budget statement; and method of evaluating success.

The 2021 applications must be submitted by Saturday, Feb. 20. Recipients will be notified in March. A letter describing and evaluating the project shall be submitted to NSEA's Scholarship and Grants Committee within three months of project completion.

The grants are named for John Lynch, NSEA's executive director



Belz



Lynch



Krause

from 1959 to 1974; Paul Belz, executive director from 1974-84; and Helen Krause, NSEA president in 1966 and the first Nebraskan to serve on NEA's Executive Committee.

For details, or for an application form, look for the link on the NSEA website home page. The form will be posted through Saturday, Feb. 20, at:

www.nsea.org/BLK

Get details from Sally Bodtke at 1-800-742-0047 or via email at: **sally.bodtke@nsea.org**

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District 2
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Mailed By: **The Nebraska State Education Association**
605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742

Mystery Skype

From Lisa Mims, a fifth-grade teacher in Delaware:

“Looking for a great way to not only teach Geography skills but also create global connections? Try Mystery Skype. The idea is straightforward and fun: one classroom places a call via Skype to another classroom, and they try to guess where the other classroom is located. Take turns answering yes or no questions until they guess each other’s residence. The kids have a great time using atlases, Google Earth, and Google Maps trying to find out where the other class is located. Here’s a helpful blog post if you want more details: “Mystery Skype: Connecting Our Classrooms One Skype at a Time!”



Sign up for Works4Me messages at: nea.org/tools/Works4Me.html



Staff Appreciated! It was a cold, dark October morning ... when the Kearney Education Association surprised secondary teachers with staff appreciation packets. Led by KEA President Amber Taylor and other KEA leaders, along with NSEA staff, educators arriving at school were given goodie bags of breakfast, snacks, water and small giveaways from EHA Wellness, Horace Mann and NSEA-Retired. In each bag was information about KEA/NSEA membership. One bag at each building included a “Golden Ticket” for a free lunch for the winner and three colleagues. Pictured outside Horizon Middle School are KEA member Kathleen Ockinga, left, and NSEA Organizational Specialist Kim Story.