

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • November 2021

A smiling man with a shaved head and a blue polo shirt with a light blue horizontal stripe across the chest. He is holding a red apple trophy on a wooden base. The background is a blurred classroom with bookshelves.

LEE PEREZ

Nebraska's 2022
Teacher of the Year

**Public Service
Loan Forgiveness
overhaul**

**American Education
Week Nov. 15-19**

**Delegate Assembly
returns in person**



THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
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nsea.org

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Applications open for 2022 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grant

Dollars promote local association, staff growth

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2022 application deadline is Monday, Feb. 28.

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 recipients are any NSEA member, group of NSEA members or any NSEA local association.

The application must include an abstract of the project (not to exceed four typed pages) including the following information:

- need;
- how the project will address that need and relate to professional growth goals;
- project description;
- timeline;

- a budget statement; and
- methods of evaluating project success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on Feb. 28, 2022. Recipients will be notified in March.

A letter describing and evaluating the project must be submitted by the recipients to NSEA's Scholarship and Grants Committee within three months of project completion.

The grants are named for John Lynch, NSEA's executive director from 1959 to 1974; Paul Belz, executive director from 1974 to 1984; and Helen Krause, NSEA president in 1966 and the first Nebraskan to serve on NEA's Executive Committee.

Further details and the application form may be found at www.nsea.org/BLK. For questions, contact Brandon Langlois at 1-800-742-0047 or email brandon.langlois@nsea.org.

Bargaining calendar for 2022-23 contract

State law sets a firm schedule for bargaining activities, which determines your pay and working conditions. Now is the time to bargain for the 2022-23 contract year.

Nov. 1: Bargaining must commence on or before this date.

Dec. 18: Decision Day. Talks must be complete, or your local must be willing to settle without legal assistance, or your local must notify your NSEA organizational specialist of the likely need to prepare for resolution officer training.

January: Locals pursuing resolution officer training work with NSEA to prepare their case or conclude bargaining on their own and ratify the contract.

Feb. 8: Statutory filing date for resolution officer proceedings.

March 25: Proceedings end, and locals provide a signed copy of the new agreement to NSEA.

For further details, talk with your NSEA organizational specialist.

Would you like to write for The Voice?

Would you like to write for *The Voice*? Perhaps a column or an article on what is working in your classroom? Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise education-related. Submit your questions and your topics to thevoice@nsea.org.

On the Cover: Nebraska's 2022 Teacher of the Year Lee Perez talks about his experiences in the classroom, why Nebraska needs more teachers of color, and a push for English as a Second Language training for all teachers. Read more on page 7.

Things aren't always as they seem



**NSEA
President
Jenni Benson**

“

*As educators,
you are working
your hearts out.
Each of you has
a perspective
that deserves
to be heard. We
need to listen to
each other.*

”

per-spec-tive *noun* a particular attitude toward or way of regarding something; a point of view

I have been writing nine or 10 articles a year for the past four years. I went back and read my very first article about my first teaching job 35 years ago in Austin, Texas. I read it with fresh eyes from a revised perspective after being the president of NSEA for four years.

The story is the same, but I am not the same person I was four years ago. We are not the same people we were when this pandemic started.

Author C.S.

Lewis said, "What you see and what you hear depends a great deal on where you are standing. It also depends on what kind of person you are."

Our perspectives change – sometimes negatively and sometimes positively – depending on where we are standing. Where are you standing now? Has the kind of person you are changed?

I have and will always be a sensitive person. I tend to internalize and take things personally. I know that hasn't changed. In fact, it has probably intensified through COVID. I reflect on, or rather overthink, everything. I tell myself to put myself in the other person's position and see the world through their eyes.

How is that working for me? Some days well, other days not so well. We live in a sometimes stressful and often divisive world. There are so many sides to every story, and many times things are not as they seem.

I have written about my grandkids previously. I definitely have a Gram perspective on many things. They keep me grounded and balanced.

I am thrilled to share we welcomed number nine, Nathaniel Paul Absalon, in October. Number 10 will be here as this edition arrives in your mailbox.

We have grandchildren ranging from newborns to 18-year-old twins. The twins are seniors in high school. Their perspective is unique for

sure.

I try to put my 18-year-old self in their position. I did not like being a teenager at all. When people say they would go back to high school, I cringe. I can relate to the struggles my grandkids have. They have different struggles, but it boggles my mind how similar they are to the struggles in my past.

My daughter adopted the twins when they were 10 years old. They had been in and out of foster care, along with their five siblings, for

many years. Their perspective is definitely part of the past trauma in their lives.

We all have experiences that alter our perspective. We should value and honor our students' experiences and perspectives, which may alter our own perspective on situations.

This continues to be a trying time for educators, children,

families and communities. As educators, you are working your hearts out. Each of you has a perspective that deserves to be heard. We need to listen to each other.

I go back to the article I first wrote about my first teaching job and my para, Bea. She would tell me to go to the lounge and listen. She taught me I would learn a lot from listening, and I do. Each day we hear from members with a wide range of experiences and voices. Whether you are in a small or large local association, your perspective is important and respected.

We will be sending out an all-member survey this month to gather input about our members' current realities. We would like to gather more detailed information to help NSEA drive decisions, service and support.

Thank you for your membership. Please know we will continue to listen to a diverse perspective as we represent NSEA members across Nebraska.



A senior's perspective: Airion and Mia, my oldest twin grandchildren, are seniors in high school this year.

Examine paystub for accuracy each payday

Getting paid is important, and when your check doesn't add up correctly, it can be a big deal.

"Check your first paycheck every school year (usually in September) and then periodically after that," NSEA Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan said. "Human error happens. Several dozen teachers a year (in Nebraska) have incorrect salary placement."

NSEA works with local association leaders to train them on how to confirm their own pay, as well as that of their colleagues.

Members should always obtain a copy of their paystub, whether on paper or electronically, from the school district. If you're not sure how to access yours, talk to your local leader or building representative.

Also keep a current copy of the Negotiated Agreement Salary Schedule, and keep track yourself of what salary step you are on, based on your years of experience and/or advanced degrees. If you're unsure where you should be on the salary schedule, talk to your local leader or head negotiator.



Once you have those two documents, look at the line on your paystub that says "Gross Pay." That's your total pay, before retirement, taxes and other deductions.

"Multiply your gross pay by 12, and compare that to your correct placement on the salary schedule. In most circumstances, they should match up," Guinan said.

Most school districts spread salaries over 12 months so that educators still have a steady income over the summer months. If yours does not, multiply instead by the number of months in your contract.

If you are supposed to be compensated for extra duties, that will affect the amount

of your check, too.

Time is of the essence when a paycheck is incorrect. Whether you're underpaid or overpaid, it's important to know sooner rather than later.

"If you're underpaid, there's a limitation on how far back you can go to correct it," Guinan said. "If you're being overpaid, the longer that happens, the more you're going to owe back, and that can become a financial burden on the teacher because the school district may demand its money back in a certain amount of time."

Mistakes can also affect the amount of money withheld for taxes and retirement, which could mess up future planning.

"Educators are often appalled when they find out they've been paid incorrectly, but it's important to do their part to check," Guinan said.

A school district may not catch the problem until it completes an audit or has another reason to look back at its records.

Local association leaders are encouraged to set up a training each September to help members understand how to calculate their pay.

EHA to announce insurance rates for '22-23

The Educators Health Alliance board took action to set rates for the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska educator health plans in late October, with rates to be have been announced Oct. 28.

Once released, the new rates, any changes to the plans and updated cost-sharing information will be available online at www.ehaplan.org.

The average annual rate increase over the past 10 years has

been about 4%.

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.

Protect yourself from identity theft

Your identity is an asset – as valuable as cash in hand – and it can be compromised by theft or a data breach.

Checking your social media settings, closing old online accounts and enabling two-factor authentication can help keep your identity – and your finances – safe.

Longtime education partner Horace Mann offers details on preventing identity theft at bit.ly/30rz850, or by scanning the QR code below.



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American Education Week honors incredible work

American Education Week Nov. 15-19 will celebrate public education and honor the individuals working to ensure that every student receives a quality education.

The week was first celebrated in 1921, with the National Education Association and the American Legion as the cosponsors.

Each day of the week has its own theme, during which we celebrate our public school community.

Festivities honor the team of people who work in our nation's public schools, everyone from the bus drivers and classroom teachers to the cafeteria workers and administrative staff, plus countless others. Schools are invited to celebrate and thank their staff in fun ways throughout the week. Here are a few ideas:

Monday, Nov. 15: Kickoff Day

Familiarize students with American Education Week in the morning announcements.

Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, thanking public school educators for their service or thanking the community for its support of public schools. You can also encourage the local paper to write an editorial about public schools and American Education Week.

Have students write an essay, "What I Would Do if I Were the School Principal" and share the best ones.

Have students make cards showing support for their educators.

Tuesday, Nov. 16: Family Day

On this day, schools across the nation invite parents into the classroom to experience what the day is like for their child.

Invite parents virtually into your classroom via video conference to read to students, talk about their career or share other educational information outside the normal curriculum. If the parent is tech-savvy, have them record a video you can show.

According to experts, parents need to take an active and assertive role in their children's education on a daily basis for optimal success at school. Ongoing research shows that parental involvement in schools improves stu-



AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK 2021

dent achievement, reduces absenteeism and restores confidence among parents in their children's education.

Parental involvement means reading to your children, checking homework every night, limiting television viewing or screen time on school nights, developing a relationship with your child's teacher and simply asking children about their school day.

Wednesday, Nov. 17: Education Support Professionals Day

This year we have seen ESPs go well beyond anything we have seen before as they work to meet the needs of our school communities in the midst of a pandemic. On ESP Day, join us to honor and advocate for the ESPs who continue keeping students safe, healthy, and ready to learn.

Host a virtual appreciation event for ESPs in your school or district using a video conferencing platform. Share photos (or screenshots) of the event on social media.

Arrange a safe food or gift delivery for ESPs in your school or district.

Encourage teachers, students and parents to mail or email a thank you letter to ESPs in their schools.

Give a social media shout out to ESPs who have been going above and beyond to help school communities during this pandemic. You can get creative through photos, videos, and more! Use [#WeLoveOurESPs](#) in your posts.

Thursday, Nov. 18: Educator for a Day

Community leaders are invited to experience the day as educators – including the challenges of teaching and the needs of students – with the guidance of school employees.

Where possible with COVID-19 precautions in place, the visiting educators perform all the duties of a regular school employee in a normal work day: teaching class, lunch and hall duty, recess supervision, working in the cafeteria and more.

The program, originally developed by the Massachusetts Teachers Association, enhances understanding among educators and community leaders. In addition, it demonstrates to public officials and other decisionmakers, the successes and challenges our educators face and underscores the need for adequate staffing, materials and facilities for students.

You might also invite members of the community virtually into your classroom via video call to read to students or talk about their career.

Ask students to dress as if they were in their future career and talk about that profession's role in the community.

Friday, Nov. 19: Substitute Educators Day

Substitute educators play a vital role in the maintenance and continuity of daily education.

Substitute Educators Day seeks to encourage increased respect for substitute education employees, advocate for all school substitutes to receive wage and health benefits for those who work most to all of a full school year, receive genuine and continual professional development and provide a reminder for school staff on effective practices to prepare for, welcome and support substitute educators.

Arrange a schoolwide recognition of substitute educators in the read-aloud school bulletin, or on the intercom announcement



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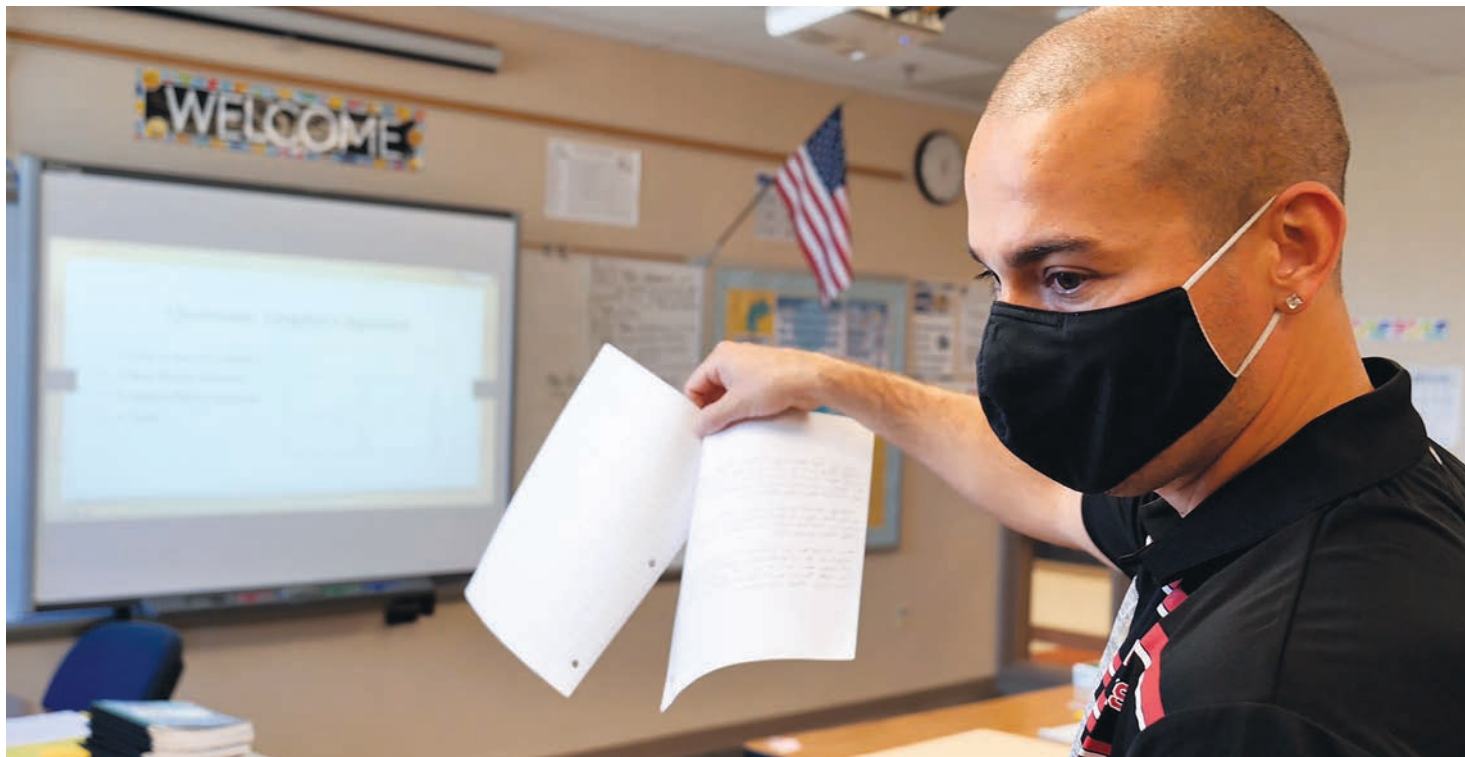
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Use your language: The 2022 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Lee Perez shows a letter written by one of his English as a Second Language students in both English and in their native language, Arabic. Perez encourages students to learn English, but to never forget and to continue using other languages. He believes all teachers should be trained in the fundamentals of ESL.

Making History

2022 Nebraska Teacher of the Year first male person of color and ESL teacher to hold title

A knot in his stomach kept Lee Perez from sleeping in the weeks leading up to the big announcement. He knew his application for Teacher of the Year had been reviewed, and the announcement could come at any time.

When he walked down the hall at Alice Buffett Magnet Middle School in Omaha to find Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt and a camera crew waiting for him, Perez knew he had won the esteemed opportunity to speak out for teachers.

"It was a surprise. I felt really nervous, but it feels amazing," Perez said.

He's the first person to hold the Nebraska Teacher of the Year title who is male, a person of color and an English as a Second Language teacher.

"I'm very proud of that, and I will say this, I will not be the last," Perez said. "I hope to inspire other people of color to run for this award because Nebraska is more culturally diverse than a lot of people give it credit for."

Each of the four finalists for the award submitted exemplary applications. Mikayla Bruner of Westside Middle School in Omaha, Abby Jones of Gibbon High School

in Gibbon, and Kim Pickering of Lincoln High School in Lincoln will be recognized as Award of Excellence winners.

Man on a mission

Perez said the TOY application requires a lot of time and effort, but it's worth it to get the opportunity to speak on behalf of educators.

"This was no ordinary application. You really had to have an objective and a mission and a path of what you want to do," he said. "My mission is to promote more culturally responsive teaching practices, get more ESL training for mainstream teachers in classrooms and to recruit and retain more teachers of color to keep up with our more cosmopolitan, diversified student body. I don't think we've had a lot of teachers of color in Nebraska."

Though he's proud to be where he is today, Perez said his path to becoming a teacher wasn't the smoothest.

"I hated school. I was not your ideal student. I skipped school a lot. I had bad grades. I barely graduated high school with like a 1.88 GPA," he said.

He fell in with the wrong crowd and

even had a few minor run-ins with law enforcement, but his teachers were always there for him.

"I had one teacher of color that really, really helped me out in high school," Perez said. "My high school basketball coach and math teacher was really influential in my life."

Perez earned his Associate of Arts degree from Mid-Plains Community College in North Platte in 2003.

When it came time to pick a career, Perez considered becoming a police officer. He attended a career fair and heard an officer speak about the life of an officer. He walked out thinking that wasn't the job for him.

He went on to get his Bachelor of Science degree in education from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2007, and then added his ESL endorsement through a graduate program at Concordia University in Seward in 2019.

"It's insane that I'm a teacher now because I hated school. I just never wanted to go. I saw no value in education, but my teachers just never ever gave up on me," Perez said.

A kindness pandemic

Those teachers made Perez realize he could help other young people.

"I can really empathize with at-risk kids, kids that come from trauma, and kids that come from a history of racism and immigration issues, which my family have had, unfortunately," he said. "It really lets me make that personal connection with these students, their families and their communities."

As an ESL teacher, Perez works with students from all over the world who have relocated to the United States as immigrants or refugees. He has students from Somalia, Burma, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Thailand, Japan and many other countries.

The trauma those students have endured, coupled with the worldwide strain of the coronavirus pandemic the last two years, motivated Perez to stand up for kindness and acceptance in his TOY application essay.

"The last couple of years have been really tough on teachers, students, families and public schools in general," he said. "I've just seen a lot of things being politicized that shouldn't be, and a lot of divisiveness, a lot of racism, a lot of hate, a lot of prejudice and discrimination."

Instead, he wants to see kindness, acceptance of differences and civil conversations.

"Kindness should be our new pandemic. It should be spreading all over the world because right now things are tough, not just in education, but in every field," he said.

The pandemic has really affected his ESL students who come from marginalized communities with big socio-economic gaps. The mental weight of that has taken a toll on Perez as well as his students over the past 18 months.

"Often times I went to bed thinking, 'Are my kids safe? Are they OK? Are they able to get a meal at night?'" he said.

Trauma-informed, culturally responsive

In addition to increasing cultural awareness and the number of teachers of color in Nebraska, Perez wants to lead professional development on trauma-informed teaching so that educators can better understand where students are coming from after traumatic experiences like immigrating or enduring a pandemic.

As Teacher of the Year, Perez wants to push for required ESL training for all classroom teachers. Nebraska currently requires all prospective teachers to take courses in special education and human relations in order to earn their teacher certificate. He wants to add a course in ESL and culturally responsive teaching to that lineup.

His second goal is to recruit and retain more teachers of color by working with the legislature and the Department of Educa-



Connecting with the world: Lee Perez, an English as a Second Language teacher in Omaha Public Schools, holds his Teacher of the Year award with Nam, one of his students from Burma, who is learning to read, write and speak English.

tion to break down barriers that too often prevent teachers from starting and staying in the education field.

Perez served on a teacher advisory panel created by Commissioner Blomstedt to help the Department of Education understand and respond to what teachers needed during pandemic-induced remote learning.

The panel, in conjunction with representatives from districts across the state, asked for and received extra plan days and mental health breaks for teachers in some districts this fall, encouraged by Blomstedt.

Perez also testified on behalf of NSEA to the legislature's Education Committee last spring, pushing for more streamlined standards for remote instruction.

As Teacher of the Year, Perez will travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with top education officials and network with Teachers of the Year from other states.

"I'm really excited to network, exchange ideas and find out how we can advocate for the profession," he said.

He also will get a chance to go to space camp, attend professional development programs and speak at an assortment of events across the state. He is slated to address college students at the NSEA-Aspiring Educators conference on Nov. 13.

Membership matters

Perez said he wouldn't be Teacher of the Year without the support of NSEA and his fellow association members. He thanked NSEA leaders, governance, members and staff for giving him opportunities to get involved and create change through the association.

"They have done so much for me and they've given me so many opportunities to develop professionally as a teacher," Perez said. "I would not have been named Nebraska Teacher of the Year without the Nebraska State Education Association, and I am proud to say that."

He never used to believe in membership, but getting involved changed his perspective.

"I used to be kind of a naysayer, but I always tell people you can't complain about things if you don't do anything about it," he said. "People are always being critical, and I always say to them, 'What are you doing to change that? When's the last time you went to a school board meeting? When's the last time you called your senator?' Teacher voices are very powerful. We can have different opinions, but just be nice to each other. At the end of the day, I want what's best for the kids."

Why belong to NSEA instead?

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- The opportunity to work with **your** colleagues to cause changes and improvements in working conditions, based on **your** priorities and interests
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April Delegate Assembly returns in-person for '22

Plans are underway for the April 2022 Delegate Assembly – the 161st assembly in NSEA history.

The event is being planned as an in-person gathering April 22-23 at the Lincoln Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

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

A keynote speaker, discussion of educational issues and consideration of updates to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions are all part of the assembly action. Proposed bylaw amendments are due by March 8. Watch for details in upcoming editions of The Voice.

In 2022, one NEA Director seat and an Education Support Professional At-Large seat are up for election to the NSEA Board of Directors.

The event also features an awards presentation, recognizing the Early Career Educator of the Year, ESP of the Year, and an award for Teaching Excellence, among other honors for NSEA members and friends of education.

Members must be elected by their local association in order to attend as a delegate to the assembly. A Delegate Assembly 101 virtual session is planned for 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 16, for those interested in learning more. Register for the session at www.nsea.org/PDforMembers.

To make your interest in serving as a delegate known, contact your local association president, your local association building or faculty representative or your NSEA organizational specialist.

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 a year.

Children's Fund available to members' students

Where there is a child in need, there is likely a teacher willing to help by opening their wallet. With many teachers already on limited budgets, filling each and every student need just isn't possible.

Our members see children who go without coats in winter weather, who come to school in the same clothes every day and who can't see the whiteboard because they lack much-needed vision care.

That's why the NSEA Children's Fund was created. Since 1994, donors to the Children's Fund have provided close to \$1 million to help children



in need – to buy them clean clothes, mittens, warm hats and shoes without holes in them, or to pay for eye doctor and dentist appointments. Donors have even purchased public bus passes for students when they had no other way to get to school.

During the pandemic in 2020, the NSEA Board of Directors, along with NSEA-Retired, directed a combined \$60,000 to food banks serving all 93 Nebraska counties to help reach students and families who needed meals.

Contributions to the Children's Fund are tax-deductible, and every penny goes to help children. NSEA covers the administrative costs out of its own budget.

Local associations are encouraged to host fundraisers and challenge other associations to contribute to the fund. For more information, to make a donation or to request help for a child in need, call 1-800-742-0047 or go to nsea.org/childrensfund.

Nominate now for NSEA awards

Members and local associations, as well as administrators and friends of education are eligible for top honors to be given at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional or deserving group.

Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 11, 2022, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online at www.nsea.org/DA, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA.

The 2022 Assembly will be held April 22-23 at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

Members are eligible for:

■ **Early Career Educator:** To honor a teacher who has excelled in their first five years.

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

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

Finalists will be notified in March, with winners announced at the Assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.

Members are also eligible for:

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

■ **Community Service:** Honors NSEA members 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:

■ **Administrator of Excellence:** Honors an administrator who strives every day to get students and staff to be successful.

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

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

Public Service Loan Forgiveness program gets much-needed

OV

Changes could help 550,000 borrowers find \$4.5 billion in student debt forgiveness

It took Paula Buckner and her husband more than 10 years to pay off their undergraduate student loans.

The two Nebraska teachers didn't qualify for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, and the years of making payments took a heavy toll on their family.

"It was quite a burden, being married at 21 and having all of that debt. Trying to find a job and making all of that work and always having that over your head," Buckner said.

The Public Service Loan Forgiveness program is supposed to provide relief for teachers and others in public service, like nurses, police officers and firefighters, after they have consistently paid on their student loans for 10 years.

It rarely works out, though.

The program began in 2007. In theory, a whole generation of borrowers should have earned loan forgiveness in 2017 – but only about 2% of those who have applied for the program have actually had their loans forgiven.

In October, the U.S. Department of Education announced plans to overhaul the PSLF program to actually provide debt relief to public servant borrowers.

That could change the game significantly

cantly for teachers like Buckner.

A damper on life

"We would have loved to have been able to do the things our friends were doing, but financially we just couldn't," Buckner said. "Things like traveling, or something as simple as going out to dinner and a movie."

The couple's undergrad debt alone was enough to make them worry about the future.

"We took quite a few years to have children simply because we needed to get those debts paid

off before adding more mouths to feed and trying to make it on what we were making at the time," she said.

When their two children were born, Buckner pulled back to working only part time to save on day care costs. She remembered getting the free and reduced lunch paperwork at the beginning of the school year.

"I think we were about \$1,000 away from qualifying for free and reduced lunch," she said. "That was kind of a kick in the gut."

After 10 years of marriage, the Buckners finally made their last student loan payment for their bachelors degrees – but

more loans were their only option for obtaining advanced degrees.

Both Buckner and her husband went back to school for their master's, but they had to be strategic about it.

"It would have been nice had we both been able to do it at the same time, but we couldn't afford to have both of us doing classes," she said.

They took out more loans for her schooling, and it took them another seven years of payments to close out those loans.

It wasn't until then that they could afford for her husband to go back for his master's.

"He did his online, but we still had to pay the fees for the campus stuff, even though he never stepped foot on campus," Buckner said.

Perhaps their biggest disappointment was how the debt affected their young children.

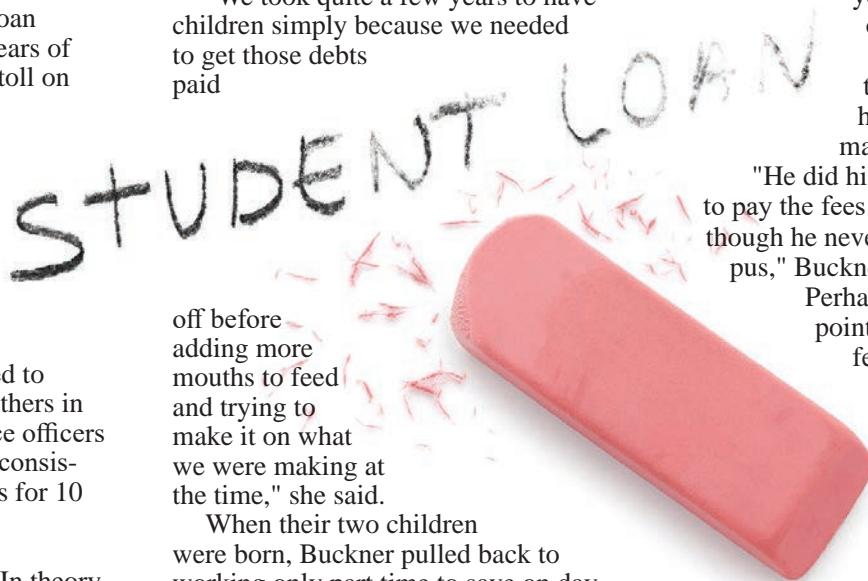
"They got told 'no' a lot," Buckner said.

"When your kids want to take dance classes and do extracurricular sports, and you have to buy the shin guards and pay for classes...They say, 'But our friends get to

do x, y and z, why can't we?' That was heart wrenching to tell them, 'We can't do that for you at this time.'"

The couple's daughter also became a teacher. She earned her bachelor's degree and is nearing the end of her master's, too.

"This is her fourth year of teaching, so



The problem with the PSLF program

Since the federal program began in 2007:

- only 16,000 borrowers have ever received forgiveness under PSLF. That's fewer than the number of educators in Nebraska alone, not to mention other public service workers
- the burden of student debt has been compounded by low teacher salaries and often leads to educators leaving the profession for higher-paying jobs, resulting in teacher shortages across the country
- student loan debt – and a lack of promised forgiveness – has caused educators to put off or give up hope of buying a home, returning to school or starting a family

ERHAUL

she has tons of loans and tons of costs," Buckner said. "She wants to go on and get her doctorate, so there's years and years more of student loan debt."

Buckner worked three or four part-time jobs during her college years and still had to take out loans to pay for her expenses.

"It was way cheaper back in the 70s and early 80s when we graduated. Now, the cost has become so exorbitant," she said. "Even if you were working full-time, you're still not able to afford tuition, room and board, food and books and all that goes along with that."

Buckner taught for 37 years at schools in the Lincoln area. She is now retired, and thankful to be out from under student loan payments.

"It was wonderful when that debt was gone," she said.

A common problem

According to research by the National Education Association, student loan debt in the U.S. has increased steadily from about \$500 billion in 2007 to nearly \$1.6 trillion in 2020.

Because of skyrocketing tuition costs and other economic factors, student loan debt now exceeds auto loan and credit card debt, second only to mortgage debt.

The burden is compounded by low teacher salaries and often leads to educators leaving the profession for higher-paying jobs so they can repay their loans, resulting in teacher shortages across the country.

A July study by NEA found that:

- About 59% of educators with loans reported the debt affected their ability to build emergency savings. Four in 10 said student loans impacted their mental, emotional or physical well-being.

- Black educators took on significantly more debt than other racial and ethnic groups, with an average initial total of \$68,300, compared to \$54,300 for White educators and \$56,400 for Latin(o/a/x), Hispanic and Chican(o/a/x) educators.

- Black educators with unpaid student loans also had the highest average current debt at \$71,600. Nearly one in five Black educators with unpaid debt

What borrowers can expect

The U.S. Department of Education says the new plan will:

- offer a waiver through Oct. 31, 2022, for borrowers who consolidated loans to have their past payments counted
- correct errors in processing PSLF applications
- review previously denied applications for potential debt cancellation
- simplify the PSLF application process
- eliminate some technical requirements that have disqualified payments in the past

For more information, go to StudentAid.gov/PSLF.

carries a current balance of at least \$105,000.

- Two-thirds of educators ages 61 and up with unpaid student loans report paying down their debt has affected their ability to save for retirement.

Educators call for change

The U.S. Department of Education in October announced a set of actions that, over the coming months, will restore the promise of PSLF. The announcement came after U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona received 48,000 letters and comments from educators and other public servants over the summer about reforming the program.

Those actions include:

- offering a time-limited waiver (through Oct. 31, 2022) so that student borrowers can count payments from all federal loan programs or repayment plans toward forgiveness. This includes loan types and payment plans that were not previously eligible.
- pursuing opportunities to automate PSLF eligibility;
- giving borrowers a way to get errors corrected;
- making it easier for members of the military to get credit toward forgiveness while they serve;
- simplifying what it means for a payment to qualify for PSLF;
- eliminating some of the technical requirements that have disqualified too many payments from counting toward forgiveness; and

- reviewing previously denied applications in an effort to correct errors and cancel qualifying loans.

"These changes are important steps toward a better and stronger PSLF program, one that will move away from the current situation in which too few borrowers receive forgiveness, and too many do not receive credit for years of payments they made because of complicated eligibility rules, servicing errors or other technicalities," the Department wrote in its fact sheet about the overhaul.

The Department estimates that the limited waiver alone will help more than 550,000 borrowers who had previously consolidated their loans see their progress toward PSLF grow automatically, with the average borrower receiving 23 additional payment credits.

This includes approximately 22,000 borrowers who will be immediately eligible to have their federal student loans discharged without further action on their part, totaling \$1.74 billion in forgiveness.

Another 27,000 borrowers could potentially qualify for \$2.82 billion in forgiveness if they certify additional periods of employment.

"In some instances, borrowers missed out on credit toward PSLF because their payments were off by a penny or two or late by only a few days," the Department wrote.

For more information on how to apply for the waiver or have your previously denied application reviewed, visit StudentAid.gov/PSLF.

From Bully to Bestie

Anti-bullying and suicide prevention efforts happen in and out of the classroom

by **Jacquelle Lane, M.Ed.**

I'm at that age now where people ask me, "Do you have children?" While I could get offended or defensive, I don't. Here's my response:

"I certainly do. I have 136 of them. I teach every day. And, I love them like they are my own."

I am a sixth-grade teacher at Omaha Public Schools and the current practice and policy fellow for NSEA.



Lane

I love my students, and I see their struggles daily. My goal as a teacher is to instruct them in English Language Arts, to teach them self-reliance and self-love and to help build their self-esteem.

In an era where it is not only difficult to be a teacher, it also is complex and challenging to be a child.

"Every Child Matters: Preventing Teen Suicide and Reducing Bullying" is my platform and something I work to address every day.

We all know a bully. Although bullying behavior often occurs in childhood and teen years, adults are bullied and are bullies, too.

In 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of Education released the first federal uniform definition of bullying:

Unwanted aggressive behavior; an observed or perceived power imbalance; behaviors that are or can be repeated.

Bullying can be direct and indirect. Sometimes it's physical, often it's verbal, and a lot of times it's shunning someone or spreading rumors or gossip.

I watch students closely during transition times – first thing in the morning when arriving at school and during lunch. I watch these times because there was a time when I was bullied. I wouldn't eat lunch, or I'd ask my mom to pick me up because I didn't know if



Book buddy: "From Bully to Bestie" serves as a resource to teach students healthy coping mechanisms to use instead of lashing out at others.

I'd have anyone to sit with at lunch.

Now I think about those kids coming to school, wondering, "Will anyone talk to me today?"

I think about the kids who face issues of economic status, race and gender identity, and it breaks my heart.

I try to prepare my students, not just with academic ability but also with the social skills necessary to succeed in life. I try to teach them to be comfortable in their own skin and celebrate their uniqueness and others' uniqueness. I want them to be content with themselves and kind to others. I want to empower them to stand up for themselves. If they see someone being bullied, I want them to stand up for that person, too.

Children matter. Locally and globally, we must start caring about our kids. They'll either be in our prison systems or they'll be contributing members to society. It's really up to us.

We touch the future by teaching students in the present.

Meet Nate

Nate was a student of mine when I worked as an intervention specialist with an alternative school in Lincoln.

He was 14 and had been expelled many times. He was in trouble with the juvenile justice system.

Nate did not grow up with a dad in his life. There were no positive role models in his home. Gang life appealed to him. Nate and his 16-year-old brother were like many young men living that lifestyle. They wanted a sense of belonging and protection.

Then one day, Nate's brother was shot seven times on the front porch of the family's home.

While his brother survived, this violence was not that shocking to Nate. He came from a family of cyclical violence with generations of incarceration.

When he came to me, it took him awhile before the tough-guy shell faded. Although he had seen things at 14 that I've never experienced at 33, he did not have a lot of love and understanding from people who were on his side. He did not have people who asked him what he was interested in and what he wanted to do with his life.

I worked with Nate not only on schoolwork but also on life skills. I encouraged him. I talked to him about Walt Disney and his failures before success, the same as with Henry Ford

and Thomas Edison. We talked about how he could stop glamorizing gang life. We built a relationship on trust and respect. He is one of the many reasons I am proud to be an educator.

Teaching matters

My dad was a defense attorney and I loved listening to the stories he'd tell. Once I asked him, "Why do you defend the bad guys?"

He looked at me and said, "They weren't always bad guys. The difference between the men and women I defend and you is that they didn't have people like your mom and I who talked to you and told you you're worthy and motivated you. I think they deserve a second chance."

Those words resonated with me. I became a teacher because I wanted to help children before they lost control of their lives.

I've worked at a group home and an alternative school. I spent three years as a high school English teacher in Lincoln, and for the last three years, I have taught middle school students in Omaha.

I've worked with every demographic of students, from gang members to cheerleaders. I've gotten to know all kinds of kids. I've learned about their home situations. I've heard about their moms doing drugs and about all kinds of abuse. I have seen the struggles of my students and continue to learn from them.

Meet Shelly

While teaching English in Lincoln public schools, I felt the pressure of assessment testing as much as the students did.

I was going through the instructions for the assessment test when my student, Shelly, pulled me aside. She said, "I don't know how I'm going to keep my eyes open today. I slept in my car. We're homeless."

Shelly, her mom and her little sister were sleeping in their car. You never know what challenges children are bringing to school.

I was glad to know Shelly trusted me and knew I would have her back. She knew school was a safe place, and that's what I think you have to establish if you are working with young people, that you're a safe place.

When I was teaching at Metro Community College, these bright-eyed, bushy-tailed students would come in

and say "I'm going to be a teacher," thinking the act of teaching would be enough to make a difference in a child's life.

I admit, in the beginning I was like that, too.

I'd ask them, "Have you ever gone to an event in some of your students' communities? Have you ever gone to a Black church? Have you ever gone to a Latino festival so you could see what's really important to your students?"

I remember the first time I went to

“

I try to prepare my students, not just with academic ability but also with the social skills necessary to succeed in life. I try to teach them to be comfortable in their own skin and celebrate their uniqueness and others' uniqueness. I want them to be content with themselves and kind to others.

”

Salem Baptist, which is totally different from any Catholic or evangelical service I'd ever attended. I watched my students perform in a program, and that was so important to them.

Making our students feel important is critical, inside and outside of the classroom. Everyone needs to feel like they're welcome and valued.

The African proverb, "It takes a village," remains true today. We all must be concerned for our children and help in their development.

If there was somebody or a whole host of somebodies and we could start a movement, we could stop the demise of our children before it's too late.

We can instill in children the message that "you should be here, you deserve to be here, and the world needs you."

From Bully to Bestie

I have written a book, "From Bully to Bestie." I want it to be a tool to help children cope with stress instead of taking those feelings out on others.

"From Bully to Bestie" is more like a set of guidelines that focuses on positive versus negative measures. It provides open discussion about an uncomfortable topic. Bullying is not only an uncomfortable topic for children, but for parents, too.

As a counselor, I want to have a book that when a child comes into my office, I can say, "Let's read this book and then talk." The book focuses on strategies children can use when they feel like lashing out at others.

From relieving stress by writing, doing artwork, caring for a pet or exercising, a common-sense approach works best.

While "From Bully to Bestie" addresses bullying, my platform, "Every Child Matters: Preventing Teen Suicide and Reducing Bullying," aims to raise awareness to the even greater threat of teen suicide.

Every 36 hours in Nebraska, one person dies from suicide. Nationwide among 15-24-year-olds, suicide is the second-leading cause of death.

My goal is to decrease this devastating statistic by working with communities, schools, parents and local government. I want to educate stakeholders on bullying prevention and the effect of bullying in regard to suicide.

As a teacher and as a community, it's important we know the risk factors for suicide – economic status, race, gender identity, absence of family support and structure, abuse, social isolation, and bullying – and address them.

It's our job, our responsibility, to get to know young people and to form a bond of trust so they have someone to turn to. If you don't earn their trust, not only are you not going to reach them, you're going to miss out on knowing who they really are. Working together, we can teach the next generation that every child matters.



Looking for more?

"From Bully to Bestie" was one of many practical, information-packed sessions offered at NSEA University, a three-day members-only professional learning conference held in July. Watch for upcoming registration details for the July 12-14, 2022, NSEA U in future editions of The Voice, or go to www.nsea.org/nseau for more information.

AE plans fall conference

NSEA's Aspiring Educators will host a virtual conference Nov. 13. The 2022 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Lee Perez will speak.

AE is the only student-led, student-run and student-funded organization dedicated to preparing aspiring educators to lead in the classroom.

Breakout sessions at the conference will include classroom management, resume building, implicit bias training, effective parent-teacher communications, student loan forgiveness and much more.

A new educator panel will discuss their experiences over the lunch break, and the conference will close with a cooperating teacher panel.

AE members are invited to register for the conference, which will run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Zoom, by visiting www.nsea.org/AE-Fall.

For more information, or to join an AE chapter on your college or university campus, call 1-800-742-0047.

A protective prototype



Ultimate PPE: English instructor Kristi Rastede and Dean of Business and Humanities Dr. Wade Herley demonstrate the ultimate personal protective environment at Northeast Community College. The Plexiglas enclosure, complete with a door, was a prototype designed to provide extra protection for instructors against the COVID-19 virus in the classroom.



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* For those interested in school-based mental health careers

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Advance of S.E.E.D. system will change how educators grow

Understanding the difference between 'support' and 'development' key component



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

Will the school years of 2020 and 2021 be remembered as a time when education evolved in Nebraska? The Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development Educator Effectiveness System is designed to make this a reality.

As Nebraska moves toward post-COVID education, more emphasis on the support and development of educators will become a necessary and welcomed change.

Support or development?

Support means "to hold up or serve as a foundation or prop for," according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. In education, support is provided for foundational STUDENT-facing initiatives, such as a teacher's effective use of materials, classroom procedures and behavior interventions.

Development means "the act of causing to evolve or unfold gradually," the dictionary says. In education, development is TEACHER-facing personal and professional growth over their career. Teacher development occurs when they engage in activities such as working toward professional goals, building personal awareness about equity in the classroom or seeking an advanced degree.

What a teacher might say when provided support versus when they are engaging in development:

"I can learn to use the student information system to communicate with students and parents." (Support)

"As a mentor, I can help my grade level colleague reflect on a goal to create student engagement." (Development)

What's the difference?

The nuances between both the support and development of teachers get tricky. They are two different processes, but are linked in the complexities of teaching and learning. Teachers have likely received support in using strategies to teach in their content area.

In this training, they probably learned about the science and theory underpinning the strategy and were encouraged to adopt it as a regular classroom practice.

Support is interested in creating a solid set of strategies to ensure the teacher can successfully impact student growth.

Development is interested in the growth of

the teacher – shaping beliefs, goals, mindsets and innovation. Development occurs after the support is received – when strategy is applied in the classroom and the context of the classroom comes into play.

This development, influenced by the teacher's experiences in the classroom, might lead to the recognition of others in the school who can assist with a teacher's development.

This kind of development culture also calls teachers to look for opportunities to develop and mentor others. Sometimes development leads to new roles in education through teacher leadership or seeking another endorsement or degree.

Changing understanding

Too often, support and development are confused as the same process, but each must be understood by school leaders and teachers. This fundamental shift will affect the roles of principals, instructional coaches, colleagues, educational service unit and Nebraska Department of Education personnel, and higher education faculty. This shift means all levels, from the school board to the classroom, regardless of status, value the investment in effective educators.

As the S.E.E.D. Educator Effectiveness System grows, feedback will become the connective tissue of professional support and development.

The role of principal will shift from administering evaluations as feedback to partnerships suited to formative development, which will become expected and reciprocal.

School leaders will see not just the support of teachers, but the development of all staff members, as a priority shared by the school. School leaders also seek development and feedback as a necessary ingredient for themselves.

Teachers in this system seek and offer professional feedback as a regular part of their day. Success relies on a school's ability to honor the voice and expertise of its educators regardless of role, position or status.

You can find a link to the Educator Effectiveness site here: www.education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness.

The Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards may be found at bit.ly/3pg8KW0.



Dr. Julie Downing,
NDE Educator
Effectiveness
Specialist



Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning Network Specialist

Tools can help manage diabetes

November is Diabetes Awareness month, and although it is an often-invisible disease, diabetes affects more than 34 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control. It is also the seventh-leading cause of death in the United States, and people with diagnosed diabetes have a 50% higher risk of early death than those without.

The financial burden of diabetes is substantial. The CDC reports that the disease costs the U.S. an estimated \$327 billion annually because of increased medical costs and lost wages.

People with diagnosed diabetes have on average 2.3 times higher medical costs than those without diabetes.

Fortunately, better health management can help people with diabetes live longer and healthier lives, preventing or delaying diabetes complications.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, a partner with the Educators Health Alliance, offers innovative, proven solutions to manage, and in some cases reverse, diabetes.

Its suite of diabetes management and reversal offerings complement each other.

Type 1, type 2 and prediabetes management program

BCBSNE nurse diabetes educators use a mobile platform powered by Wellframe to deliver personalized support and resources to patients, show real-time progress and enable easy two-way communication that helps members manage type 1 and type 2 diabetes and prediabetes.

Type 2 diabetes reversal program

Newly available to EHA members, a program powered by Virta can help reverse type 2 diabetes using a clinically proven combination of nutritional ketosis, medical supervision and one-on-one health coaching. Virta helps participants lose weight, reduce blood sugar and A1c and get off diabetes medications for good.

\$0 cost share for preferred insulin

Beginning in Jan. 2022, BCBSNE will offer preferred insulin therapy at



Managing numbers: For people living with diabetes, checking blood sugar numbers regularly is an important part of managing the condition.

no cost to members diagnosed with diabetes.

Nurses on staff

To support these programs, BCBSNE has nurse diabetes educators on staff to help inform, encourage and support those looking to better manage their condition.

“The fact that BCBSNE covers diabetes education programs, including

programs for prediabetes, allows our members to get the most out of their health care coverage,” Kelly Zelenda, nurse diabetes educator, said. “We’re able to work with customers one-on-one and help them through their journey to a healthier lifestyle.”

To learn how these programs can help you on your health journey, call 877-721-2583 or visit [NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop](https://www.NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop).

An advertisement for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. It features a woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned top, sitting and smiling. To her left is a blue graphic with white text that reads: "Thank you for letting us be part of your story". Below this text is the website "Visit NebraskaBlue.com/EHAPop". At the bottom left is the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska logo. At the bottom right, in small text, it says: "Health benefits for EHA are provided by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association." In the top right corner of the ad, there are icons of a cross and a shield.

Save with exclusive member offers in November

The NEA Discount Marketplace, powered by Rakuten, enables members to earn cash back when they shop and save on brand-name merchandise from more than 2,500 top retailers and online stores. Check out the following member-exclusive deals in November and search more retailers at neamb.com/marketplace:

Dell

Save on powerful desktops and laptops for home, school or office. With the holidays coming, check out gaming PCs and accessories. Free standard delivery, with no minimum purchase!

Macy's

Enhance autumn style and comfort with seasonal apparel, footwear, accessories, cosmetics and home furnishings from Macy's. Same-day delivery and curbside pickup available.

JC Penney

Freshen up your space for fall! Beautify bed and bath and glamorize dining and entertaining spaces. Download coupons for weekend specials. Free standard shipping with orders of \$75 or more.

Shoes.com

Favor your feet with footwear for any activity or occasion. From sandals and hiking boots to flats and spike heels, Shoes.com has you covered. Save more with weekly deals. Get free economy shipping on purchases of \$50 or more.

Chewy.com

Don't forget your pets! Find thousands of great products for your furry, feathered and scaly friends. Chewy has it all: food, treats, beds, habitats and toys—even prescriptions. Access 24/7 help, and get one- to three-day shipping on orders of \$49 or more.

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Answer simple questions each day to assess your mood, identify patterns, and track health activities like sleep and exercise.

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Designed by experts for a range of needs, our Guided Journeys use proven therapies to help you feel more in control and build skills.

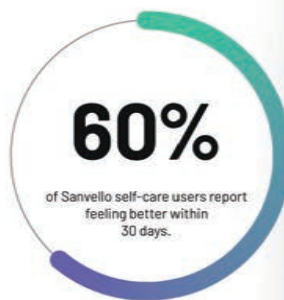
COPING TOOLS

Reach for that "just right" tool to relax, be in the moment, or manage stressful situations.

PROGRESS ASSESSMENTS

Through weekly check-ins, we help you create a roadmap for improvement. Track where you are, set goals, and make strides week by week.

An ever-expanding library of self-care resources including meditation, coping tools and cognitive behavioral therapy-based experiences helps you build healthy habits and feel better.

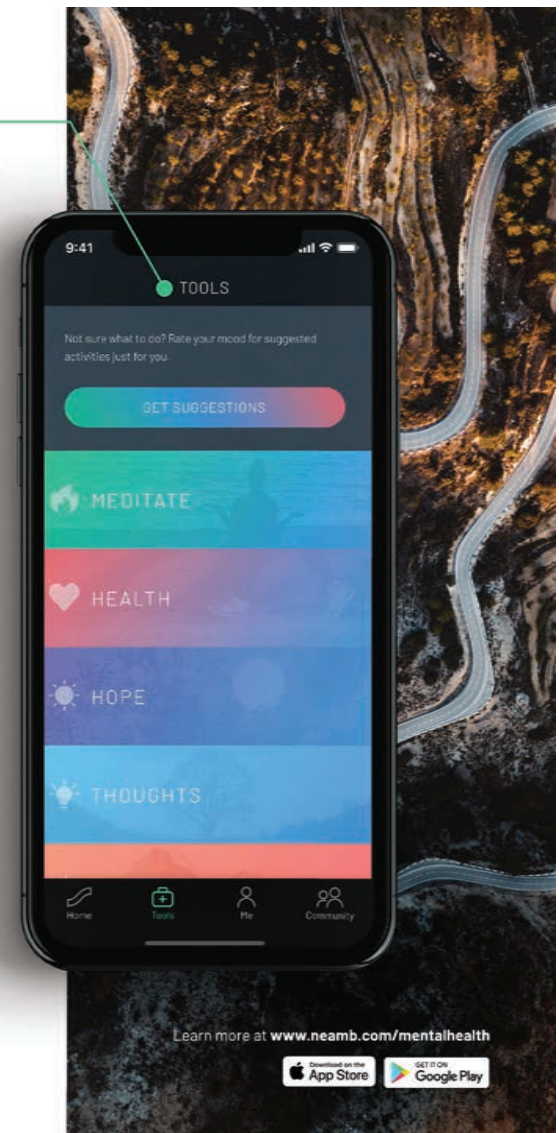


Tools and support people love. But don't take our word for it — take theirs.

"If you've ever needed something to help get you to a good place, I've yet to find something better. It equips you to handle whatever may arise."

"I use this every day. It's like having a good friend give me encouragement, and keeps me motivated."

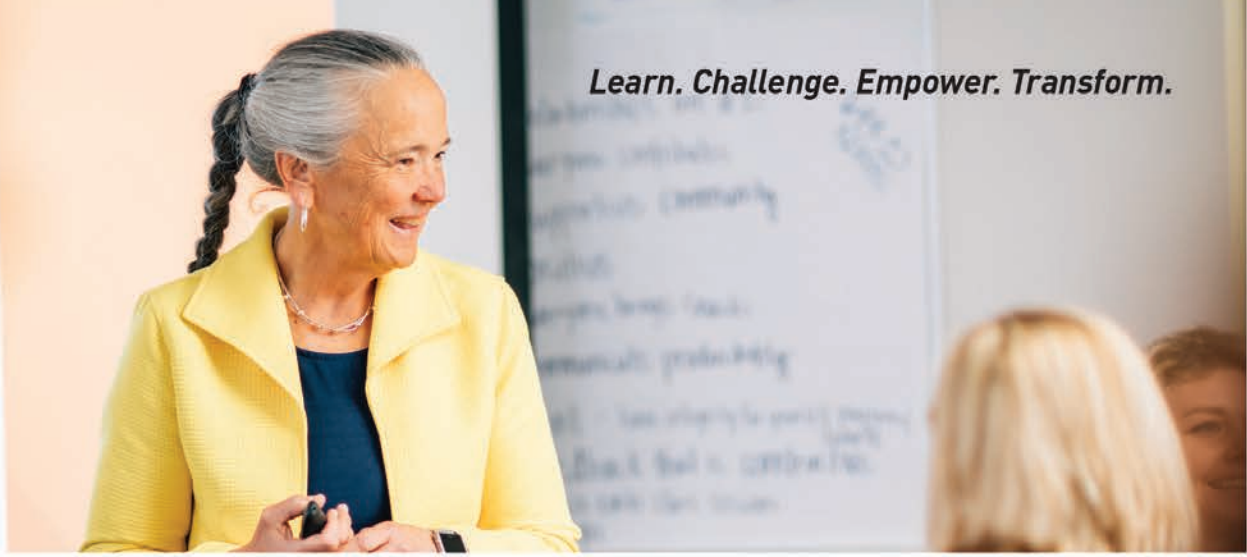
"I feel like I can actually get better. It really is an all-in-one app for me."



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Take care of yourself, each other

First, I want to thank all of you for the tremendous work you are doing. We have heard from so many members about the stresses faced as the pandemic wears on. We are continuing to work both internally with our leadership as well as externally with other stakeholders to help elevate member concerns and search for solutions. This month I have a menu of items to share with you.

Educators Health Alliance

If your school district utilizes the Educators Health Alliance through Blue Cross Blue Shield, please note that the mental health benefit has changed. As of Sept. 1, in-network behavioral health office services are covered at 100% of BCBSNE's allowable amount, whether in-person or by telehealth. (Out-of-network telehealth visits will continue to be non-covered.) HSA-eligible High Deductible Health Plans are still subject to deductible and coinsurance for in-person and telehealth behavioral health office visits. (Per IRS regulations, except for preventive health benefits, insurance carriers cannot pay first dollar coverage on HSA-eligible HDHP plans). The current definition of preventive health benefits does not include behavioral health treatment.

Supporting new colleagues

The NSEA has partnered with the NEA and several state associations to offer two support programs for new members.

Educators Leading the Profession is a consortium of state associations piloting a program to provide instructional coaches and mentors for new educators. The NSEA has partnered with Falls City and Raymond Central to assist new teachers. We are still looking for instructional coaches for this program.

Through a grant from the NEA, the NSEA is also providing mentors to NSEA members anywhere in the state who would like guidance. If you know of someone who may benefit from a mentor, have them contact their organizational specialist.

If you are interested in mentoring a colleague or being an instructional coach (both paid part-time positions) contact Jacquelle Lane at jacquelle.lane@nsea.org.

National Indian Education Association Conference

The NIEA national conference was held in Omaha last month. NEA and NSEA were both sponsors of the conference. I have been to many, many conferences in

my career, and the workshop presentations at this conference were some of the best I have ever experienced. I wanted to share some of the learning with you this month and will continue to do so in December.

Your NEA Director Tracy Hartman-Bradley presented to a packed room, sharing information on the Youth Enjoy Science Research Club partnership with the Omaha Public Schools Native Indigenous Centered Education Program and the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Their program, part of a larger research education pathways program, provides Indigenous middle school students with early cancer research experiences through school-based projects.

The Native American Hall of Fame honors Native American achievements in society from the Civil War to the present day. It provides accurate and comprehensive resources to learn about contemporary Native Americans. In addition to an Instructional Leadership curriculum for grades 8-12, its website also has biographies of their inductees at nativehalloffame.org.

A session that really affected me was Recognizing Boarding School Era Historical Trauma. In 1898,

the graduating class at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School was told "Let all that is Indian in you die." This philosophy of "Kill the Indian, save the man" inflicted trauma on generations of Native American families whose children were forcibly taken from them.

In 1973, 60,000 American Indian children are estimated to have been enrolled in Indian boarding schools. It wasn't until 1978 that Congress passed and the president signed the Indian Child Welfare Act, giving Native American parents the legal right to refuse their child's placement in a school.

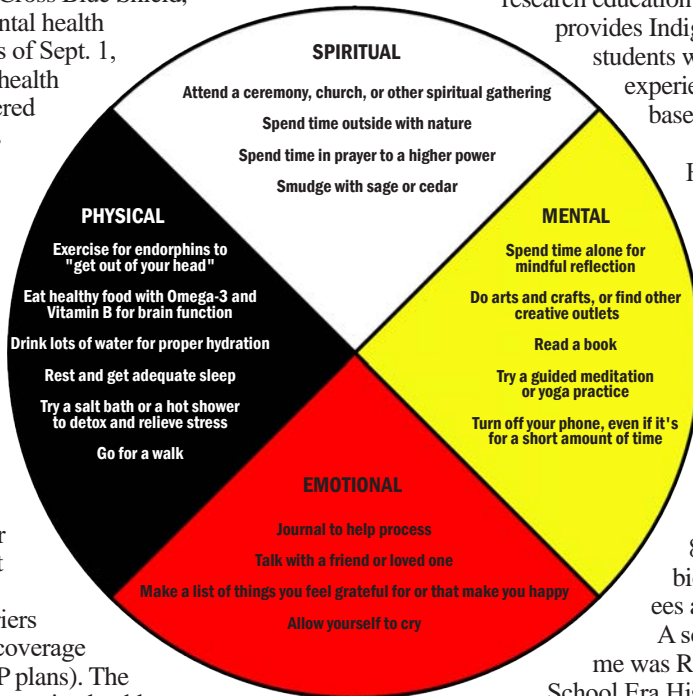
The NIEA has free lesson plans you can utilize to teach about Indian Boarding School history. They can be found at boardingschoolhealing.org/curriculum.

The Strategies for Self-Care in the medicine wheel above were presented by the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. If you're feeling anxious, stressed, depressed, panicked or triggered, try one thing from each quadrant to take care of your health – mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Let me leave with you two quotes that really resonated with me:

"If we carry intergenerational trauma (and we do), then we also carry intergenerational wisdom. It's in our genes and in our DNA." – Kazu Haga

"Be strong and educate my children." – Chief Little Priest



Executive Director Maddie Fennell

“

I have been to many, many conferences in my career, and the workshop presentations at this conference were some of the best I have ever experienced.

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Niemoth recognized for 40 years of hunter safety

NSEA-Retired member John Niemoth has been recognized by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for more than 40 years of teaching Hunter Safety Education in public schools.

An old photo of a seventh-grade Conservation Education Safety Class at Barneston Public School brought back memories for Niemoth about the teaching methods used and the topics covered in the 1970s.

"Floor shuffleboard sticks and brooms were great implements to practice safe gun handling," he said. "Dis-



Forty years: NSEA-Retired member John Niemoth shows his certificate from Nebraska Game and Parks in honor of four decades of teaching hunter safety classes.

crediting the usage of chicken hawks and the labeling of snakes was a major hurdle to overcome. Conservation was an important part of the education learning process and environmental awareness. The prevention of accidents had to be practiced every time a firearm was picked up and not just on the hunt."



Way back: A seventh-grade Barneston Public Schools Conservation Education Safety Class is pictured in the 1970s outside the school's science room.

I'm Back Substitute Teaching!

by Sue McNeil

I have been subbing for the past 11 years, ever since I retired from the classroom...until the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

After taking this past year off because of COVID-19, I'm back in the classroom substitute teaching. I've been fully vaccinated and wear a mask so I feel as comfortable as possible in the covid world we find ourselves.

I've been subbing this fall in the school where I taught for most of my educational career. It is a small rural school in the heart of the Sandhills. I taught many of the current students' parents or aunts and uncles or older siblings. It's interesting to witness this next generation and be a part of their educational growth. I love being "back" in the classroom!

I used to be the one and only 7-12 Social Studies teacher in this school. I feel at home teaching in this old school building. (Loup County Public School is celebrating the 100th year of the school building, 1921-2021.) My mind reels with memories of my teaching days. I'm thankful for my career choice.



McNeil

This calling to be a teacher has brought me joy over the years. Looking back on my life, I'm grateful I chose to be an educator. When you love your job, it doesn't feel so much like "work." I was able to make a difference on a daily basis and at the same time, the students made a difference on my life. Feeling satisfied with your career is worth more than a big salary at some other job.

My favorite call to be a substitute teacher is when I get asked to teach for my daughter. She is the one and only 7-12 English teacher at the same school where I taught. This is her first year back teaching at her alma mater. When you are a sub, you get a real feel for the type of teacher for whom you are subbing. The classroom and students give off a vibe of the teacher whose room you inhabit for that day. My daughter's room is no different.

Here I sense a caring teacher who knows how to best reach her students. Her students work and respond to me, the sub, in a respectful, positive way. I know in my gut this is a fantastic teacher. You can sense it in the room and in the students' behavior. She has become an even better teacher than I was back in my day. This makes me so proud.

In October, I subbed for my daughter for a full week while she attended a Teacher of the Year gathering in Washington, D.C. She was the 2020 Nebraska TOY. Because of COVID-19, most of the events for these

exceptional teachers were cancelled or postponed. This D.C. event was one of the few that got rescheduled. All of the TOYs from across the United States got to visit the White House and meet the president and the first lady, an educator herself. As teachers, they got to be in the spotlight and showcase what is right with public education in our country today.

It was quite unique that the TOY of 2020 had as her sub the TOY of 1995, her mom. Yes, back 26 years ago, I was one of the teachers who got to go to the White House to meet the president and highlight public education in America.

Life has come full circle for this family of educators. We both feel blessed to have been chosen as a TOY in a career where what we do on a daily basis really does matter.

I encourage you to take the leap and consider being a substitute teacher. Even with all of the difficulties of the previous couple of years, there's something special about being back in the classroom. You may just find yourself enjoying it.

Sue McNeil is a retired social studies teacher from Taylor and a member of NSEA-Retired.

Have you started a new adventure or hobby? Send your story to NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at dtonack@neb.rr.com.

ESP Spotlight: Travis Vo

Travis Vo serves as the Education Support Professionals representative on the NSEA Board of Directors, but his work goes far beyond that.

Vo is an IT specialist at Westside Community Schools, where he has worked the past four years.

Prior to that, he oversaw technology programming for K-12 youth at the Boys and Girls Club of the Midlands.

Vo joined NSEA in 2018, when he was having problems at work and didn't know who to talk to. A Facebook message connected him to NSEA Organizational Specialist Andy Isaacson, and a meeting over coffee turned into the beginning of Vo's association leadership journey.

"Travis is a strong advocate for our ESPs in Nebraska," NSEA Organizational Specialist Judy Roach said. "He joined in 2018 to find help for himself, and then jumped in with both feet to become an advocate and help other ESPs."

Vo worked to organize his Westside colleagues, and all but one joined the local association. He met with administrators to begin a series of "Meet and Confer" meetings to collaborate on better working conditions and opportunities for staff.

He also fought for inclusion on the Westside Education Association's Executive Board, where he was granted a seat at the table, representing education support professionals.

In 2019, he attended the NEA ESP Conference in Las Vegas, the largest convening of education support professionals in the nation.

NSEA member Jenny Wood and Roach attended as well. The three developed a plan to establish an ESP Task Force to improve ESP membership and outcomes back home in Nebraska.

At the 2019 Delegate Assembly, Vo and Wood presented a new



Advocating for ESPs: From left, Travis Vo of Westside is pictured with NSEA Organizational Specialist Judy Roach and fellow ESP Jenny Wood of South Sioux City at the 2019 ESP Conference.

business item to the assembly floor that would legitimize and officially create the NSEA ESP Task Force. The NBI passed.

This task force developed a long-range plan on ways to increase ESP membership in Nebraska, including recommending bylaw revisions for the ESP Committee to the NSEA Board.

It was also at the 2019 Delegate Assembly that Vo was elected to serve on the NSEA Board of Directors, making him the first-ever ESP member to have voting rights on the board. He also attended the 2019 NEA Representative Assembly in Houston.

In addition to his advocacy work with ESP members, Vo is an early career educator and has served on the NSEA NewGEN Committee, where he attended conferences such as the NEA Early Career Educator Convening and NEA Young Professionals

Caucus. He also has served on the NSEA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee Executive Team as a representative for Asian and Pacific Islander members and is a member of the NEA Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus.

Vo also attended the 2020 and 2021 NEA Virtual Representative Assemblies. Vo completed NSEA's Leadership Institute at the 2019 NSEA-U conference.

Besides being an active NSEA member and working at Westside Schools, Vo is a full-time student at UNO, where he will soon graduate with a degree in Public Policy. He is involved on-campus, serving on the UNO Student Senate.

He testified on behalf of NSEA in front of the 2021 Nebraska Legislature's Education Committee, speaking out for continued pay for ESPs through epidemics.

Are you in a good place financially? Get help getting there

One perk of your NSEA membership is access to exclusive webinars tailored to the education profession.

A full slate of sessions is set for 2021-22, with topics ranging from building your own budget to self-care. Go to nsea.org/webinars for a complete list of sessions.

NSEA members only

■ **Planning the Perfect Vacation:** Thursday, Nov. 4, 7:30 p.m. Join NEA Member Benefits to learn how you can save on hotels, car rentals and flights through your membership.

■ **Student Loan Forgiveness:** Tuesday, Nov. 9, 5:30 p.m. Learn about tools available to members for reducing or managing student loan debt.

■ **Navigator Program:** Tuesday, Nov. 9, 6:30 p.m. Learn to use the NEA Debt Navigator, which can find forgiveness or cancellation programs you may qualify for.

■ **Budgeting:** Tuesday, Nov. 9, 7:30 p.m. Learn budgeting tips from NEA Member Benefits' Susan Estes.

■ **Budgeting:** Monday, Nov. 15, 6:30 p.m.

■ **Financial Planning:** Monday, Nov. 15, 7:30 p.m. Review financial concepts that can affect you during early, middle and late career stages with Security Benefit.

■ **Budgeting:** Thursday, Dec. 2, 6:30 p.m.

■ **Financial Planning:** Thursday, Dec. 2, 7:30 p.m.

All school employees

■ **The Power of Executive Functioning Skills:** Thursday, Nov. 11, 7:30 p.m. Learn from educator Becky Korinek about the mental processes that can help you achieve your goals.

■ **Self-care for Educators:** Thursday, Dec. 9, 7 p.m. During uncertain and unsettling times, it's hard to know what to do to make sure your staff is prepared for what's next. Join Linda Kenedy from EHA Wellness to explore how current situations are affecting school employees, the effects of stress and anxiety, and resources to help.

Present or be a mentor

NSEA is looking for members who would like to share their ideas and skills. If you are interested in leading a webinar, contact Isau Metes at isau.metes@nsea.org.

NSEA also is always seeking mentors and mentees in the classroom. For more information and to fill out an application, visit www.nsea.org/mentor.

Speaking of Education

“Our task is to provide an education for the kinds of kids we have, not the kinds of kids we used to have, or want to have, or the kids that exist in our dreams.”

— K.P. Gerlach,
education professor

Mailed By: [The Nebraska State Education Association](#)
605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742

Series a chance for students to explore journalism

The League of Women Voters of Nebraska will present two November webinars related to journalism and the importance of the First Amendment.

Both webinars are free and open to the public and are especially geared toward high school and college students interested in learning more about journalism.

Register at bit.ly/31A0nSW.

The first webinar, "Media Literacy in an Age of Disinformation," will be from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 4. The webinar will focus on how to determine if news is credible, how to improve the relationship between media and the public, and the importance of the First Amendment.

The second webinar, "On the Beat: Reflections from Journalists on Their Profession," is scheduled from noon to 1 p.m. on Thursday, Nov. 11. It will feature journalists with ties to Nebraska working at national and state media outlets.

The "Media Literacy" presentation on Nov. 4 will feature Tobin Beck, assistant professor of journalism and political science at Concordia University with more than 30 years of experience in journalism, including with United Press International; Peggy Rupprecht, associate professor of computer science,

design and journalism at Creighton University, who teaches classes on media and digital literacy; Ryan Teten, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Nebraska-Kearney, who studies the affects of social media on information consumption; and Mason Walker, research analyst focusing on journalism and media at the Pew Research Center.

The "On the Beat" presentation Nov. 11 will feature Sharon Chen, an anchor for WOWT in Omaha with television broadcast experience in Scottsbluff and Lincoln, Colorado, Hawaii and San Diego; Dee Ann Divis, an award-winning journalist reporting for Al Jazeera on commercial space, NASA, robotics and emerging technology; Matthew Hansen, editor of

the Flatwater Free Press, Nebraska's first independent nonprofit newsroom focused on investigative journalism and feature stories; and Tony Herrman, government reporter at the Hastings Tribune. The League also hopes to confirm a fourth panelist from television broadcast media.

The webinars are planned by the LWVNE's Defending Journalism and the First Amendment Action Team. For more information, contact communications@lwnnebraska.org.



What's going on in the legislature?

The 107th Nebraska Legislature will convene for its second session in January. The 60-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect Nebraska public schools.

Every decision made regarding education is a political decision. How you receive your teaching certificate, the standards you teach to, the number of students in your classroom, your curriculum, the resources you can access and the amount on your paycheck are all tied to the legislature.

The NSEA's Government Relations team monitors legislative activities and advocates for the best interests of our members and students. Bills change quickly throughout the session, and NSEA wants to keep you in the loop about how your job as an educator may be affected.

Stay up-to-date with legislative decisions that affect public education. Receive weekly updates about legislative activity in NSEA's Capitol Update, sent to your personal email inbox each week of the legislative session.

Subscribe to the Capitol Update at www.nsea.org/subscriber.

