

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • October 2019



ONE STEP *at a* TIME

- **Children's Fund Gala
Off to Great Start**
- **Need to Recruit Teachers
Gets Statewide Headlines**

**NSEA Member and
US Paralympic Medalist
Allison Aldrich Serves as a
Role Model to Her Students.**

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Synch Your Meds, Save Time and Money

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska Outlines New State Prescription Rule

The Nebraska Legislature has approved a state rule that allows Nebraskans who take multiple prescription medications to fill the prescriptions on the same day. This feature is called synchronization of medications and helps minimize the number of trips Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) members may need to make to the pharmacy to pick up prescription medications.

If a drug is eligible for synchronization, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) members may pay a prorated cost share for one or more prescription maintenance medications when a partial supply is needed to synchronize the fill date of all of their medications. Maintenance medications are those used for the treatment or management of a chronic illness.

For example, let's say a member has been taking a 30-day supply of Drug A and paid the full cost share for that drug.

Seven days later, the member needs a 30-day supply of Drug B. When they pick up the prescription for drug B and pay the full cost share for that drug, they may also pick up a seven-day supply of Drug A and pay a prorated cost share for Drug A. Then, 30 days later, when both drugs have

all been taken, they may pick up both medicines on the same day, pay the full cost share amounts for both drugs and continue this every month for as long as they need both drugs.

That process synchronizes the medicines, and thus the pharmacy trips, saving the consumer time and expense.

By state rules, medications may be

synchronized if they:

- Are covered by the member's health care plan;
- Meet the prior authorization or utilization management criteria (if needed);
- Treat a chronic illness;
- Can be safely split into short-fill periods;
- Are not a Schedule II controlled substance (drugs that have a high potential for abuse).

Members of the Educators Health Care plan that use Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska should speak with their pharmacist if they would like to sync medications.

If plan members have any questions about this program, please contact Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska's Member Services department at the number on the back of your BCBSNE member identification card.



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?

NSEA would like to begin a regular page for members, entitled Voice from the Classroom. Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise teaching related.

Submit your questions about the process, and your topics to us at:

thevoice@nsea.org

On the Cover: The three Para Olympics medals won by Grand Island middle school teacher Allison Aldrich don't define her, but they have certainly helped shape who she is and how she teaches her students. Learn more about her successes on page 7.

All About the Sharing



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“

A popular movie from some years ago was titled Six Degrees of Separation, fostering the theory that everyone on the planet is just six introductions away from any other person on the planet. In Nebraska, one could argue for three degrees of separation.

”

Wherever I go in my travels across Nebraska, I find that a common theme is “sharing.”

As I meet with members, with public officials, the media and public school parents and patrons, I share the good news about our state’s fine public schools and the good work done in classrooms in every corner of our state.

Meeting with members, I also share details about the multitude of benefits that come with Association membership.

In those meetings I like to build relationships, and in doing so I learn much. I collect many facts and anecdotes about the status of public education, about what is really happening on the front lines of education. I learn of funding and staffing shortages, of programming that performs beyond expectations, of those who go beyond the call of duty in their work.

Sometimes those anecdotes and facts are useful in communicating – sharing! – with our elected officials at all levels. These officials cannot make informed education-related decisions in a vacuum, and I fear that too often they spend too little time in our classrooms. Those policymakers need to know and understand what is happening in our buildings and I am glad to act as a conduit for relevant and useful information (with confidential details withheld, of course).

Three Degrees

That said, we live in a fast-paced world where sharing with others is sometimes very impersonal. A current television commercial on investing has a robot taking information from a customer who says “Our farm has been in the family for years.” The robot replies, “Irrelevant.”

Of course “irrelevant” means “not connected to,” making the robot’s response rather harsh and unfeeling.

Fortunately, Nebraska’s education family is in some regards quite small and close-knit, despite the fact that your Association has nearly 28,000 members. So what happens in Pawnee City is relevant to what goes on in Bennington or Grand Island or Ogallala and in every other Nebraska classroom each and every day.

A popular movie from some years ago was titled Six Degrees of Separation, fostering the theory that everyone on the planet is just six introductions away from any other person on the planet. In Nebraska, one could argue for three degrees of separation.

That closeness of community certainly makes the sharing easier.

Donated Dollars

That closeness of community frequently leads me to share details about the Children’s Fund when I’m visiting members. As many of you know, the Children’s Fund was founded 25 years ago

Teachers at every level meet students in dire

need of necessities every day, and the first inclination is to meet the need from the teacher’s personal financial resources. Meeting every need in that manner, of course, would be impossible. That’s where the Children’s Fund comes in: a quick call to NSEA and funding is usually made available with little red tape encountered.

It takes funding to make that happen, and over 25 years, the Children’s Fund has sent hundreds of thousands of dollars to meet the needs of children. Many of those dollars were donated, by teachers or corporations, but a nearly equal amount has come through donations from local associations.

I was at a meeting of the South Sioux City Education Association in September when members there agreed to give a \$500 check to the Children’s Fund. It was quite a nice surprise and an amazing example of sharing. Children across the state will benefit from that generosity. Those shared South Sioux City dollars are now relevant from border to border.

As many of you also know, we will celebrate 25 years of the Children’s Fund in early November. Look for details on that celebration elsewhere in this edition.

Please keep sharing. Please stay relevant — we’re all in this together! That togetherness is the best part of Association membership!



Children’s Fund Gift: The NSEA Children’s Fund — celebrating 25 years! — received a boost from the South Sioux City Education Association in September. SSCEA Co-President Suzanne Dailey presented NSEA President Jenni Benson a check for \$500, to be deposited in the Children’s Fund account.



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Whisinnand Gets First Sanford Award

Millard Education Association member Tom Whisinnand earned national stature in September.

The veteran teacher was revealed as the very first winner of the National University System Sanford Teacher Award, which arrived with a check for \$50,000. The honor was unveiled at an assembly at Reagan Elementary School, where Whisinnand has taught for the past 15 years.

"I was thinking: this is unbelievable, what an honor," Whisinnand told the Omaha World-Herald.

The award was presented to Whisinnand by David Andrews, president of the San Diego-based National University. The Sanford Teacher Award



Whisinnand

recognized and rewarded 51 of the nation's most inspiring teachers, one from each state and Washington, D.C. The other 50 recipients each received checks for \$10,000.

Sanford Teacher Award recipients were chosen based on a specified set of criteria indicating inspirational teaching. The awards, supported by namesake and philanthropist T. Denny Sanford, reflect the combined missions of Sanford Harmony and Sanford Inspire.

Sanford Harmony is a social emotional program for pre-K-6 students designed to foster communication and develop children into compassionate, caring adults. The Sanford Inspire movement prepares and sup-

ports inspirational teachers. Whisinnand presented at NSEA Delegate Assembly on the Sanford Inspire program.

According to National University, inspiring teachers are those who engage students, build their confidence, create an inclusive environment, motivate students to succeed and give students a voice.

Sanford is committed to supporting inspiring teaching through pre-K-12 programs that are being expanded nationally by the nonprofit National University System.

The award presentation marked the official launch of the new awards.

Recipients were chosen based on a specified set of criteria indicating inspirational teaching.

The deadline for the next set of nominations is Nov. 20. For details, go to:

sanfordteacherawards.com

Royers Earns NEA Foundation Honor

The NEA Foundation has announced that Tim Royers, a social studies teacher at Millard West High School in Omaha, is one of 45 teachers nationwide who will receive the California Casualty Award for Teaching Excellence at the NEA Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala next February in Washington, D.C.

The California Casualty Awards for Teaching Excellence awardees are nominated by their peers for their dedication to the profession, community engagement, professional development, attention to diversity and advocacy for fellow educators.

Royers received NSEA's Teaching Excellence Award at the Association's Delegate Assembly in 2018. The NSEA Teaching Excellence recipient serves as NSEA's nominee for the NEA Foundation.

Each year, the Foundation's Salute to Excellence in Education Gala draws nearly 1,000 supporters of public education, and thousands more online, to applaud the honorees. At the gala, the educators are truly the stars, celebrated throughout the night with music, performances, videos and more.

"This year's awardees are fulfilling the promise of public education in classrooms, schools, and communities from coast to coast," said Sara A. Sneed, president and CEO

of the NEA Foundation. "Each awardee has met a very high standard, and together, they are celebrated for a shared commitment to educational excellence, innovative approaches to student learning, and support for their peers."

"We are proud to honor these exceptional educators and show our appreciation for their incredible work" says Beau Brown, CEO, California Casualty. "The California Casualty awardees exemplify educators' ability to be a positive force in their students' lives."

Royers was Nebraska's 2016 Teacher of the Year.

Of the 45 state awardees nominated by their National Education Association state affiliate, five finalists will be announced early and will receive \$10,000 at the gala. The nation's top educator will be revealed at the gala on Feb. 7, 2020, and will receive an additional \$25,000. The gala will be live-streamed at:

neafoundation.org

The NEA Foundation is a public charity founded by educators for educators to improve public education for all. Since 1969, the Foundation has served as a laboratory of learning, offering funding and other resources to public school educators, their schools, and districts to solve complex teaching and learning challenges.



Royers

Benson, Hampton, Sandhills Members Receive Cal Casualty Grants

Three NSEA members – teaching in three different arts disciplines – have each received a \$250 California Music and Arts grant to assist with purchase of art materials, music and other necessities.

Recipients announced in September were Erienne Wredt, a speech and drama teacher at Benson High School in Omaha; Regina Farris, a music teacher for the Hampton Public Schools; and Amy Simonson, an art teacher for Sandhills Public Schools in Dunning.

The grant availability was announced in *The Voice* in March not long after California Casualty introduced the grants to help pay for art materials, music and other necessities. The grant is designed to foster creativity for choir, band, dance, film, theater, computer arts and graphics – or for any K-12 curriculum that employs art for learning.

California Casualty has been serving educators since 1951 and understands the importance of music and arts education. Numerous studies have concluded that

sharing a love of the arts enhances students' brain development, creativity and classroom involvement. Curriculum for music and art have been shown to reduce disciplinary issues and dropout rates.

The California Casualty grant dollars must be used to subsidize music and arts programs or projects in the classroom. Applicants must be a current member or referred by a current member of NSEA.

Apply for the next round of grants at: www.calcasmusicartsgrant.com

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

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An Olympic Role Model

Allison Aldrich Shares Lessons on Loss, Laughter and Success with Her Grand Island Students

Twice in her 31 years, Allison Aldrich has been devastated, and for decidedly different reasons.

As a high school sophomore, she was devastated when a coach told her that, because she had only one leg, she was not an athlete.

That message helped drive her to succeed, which led to a second devastating encounter. She was a member of the 2008 U.S. Paralympics sitting volleyball team that fell in a tough match to China in the gold medal round in Beijing. That loss came in the second of her three Paralympic competitions.

Surprisingly, Aldrich does not characterize the loss of her right leg below the knee to cancer at age 7 as devastating. A loss, to be certain, but it has become part of who she is. Rather than let that loss define her, she has adapted, learned, laughed and pushed to succeed, giving much credit to good role models: notably her parents and high school weights coach Fred Doscher.

“He made me believe that I could do far more than I thought I could with one leg,” she said. “I went into education because I wanted to give kids the opportunities that he gave me.”

Today, she has taught hundreds of children in health and physical education from fifth grade to high school and has coached many more. Her lesson to her students is simple:

“I tell them that if I can succeed with one leg, you can succeed with two,” said Aldrich, a member of the Grand Island Education Association.

Faith, Family, Humor

One in a million children are diagnosed with adult clear cell sarcoma. For Aldrich, it appeared on the outside of her right ankle as she neared her second-grade year. The best option for survival was amputation, followed by six months of hard chemotherapy. Each chemo regimen required a week in the hospital, followed by a week at home for recovery.

Her father Marv is a school groundskeeper and her mother Peg taught third grade. They set a good tone for Aldrich and taught their only child to handle adversity.

“We never viewed it as ‘why is this happening to me.’ We always thought about the positive and always brought humor to it,” said Aldrich. “Growing up, faith, family and humor were three constants.”

Humor was and remains a key theme. On the day of her surgery, Aldrich and her parents took a permanent marker and wrote “do not amputate” on her left leg.

Today she jokes with students during the first days of schools that “I’m kind of a big deal” and notes that her Twitter feed bears the blue Twitter verification badge – to which she says students quickly respond that the badge isn’t such a big deal anymore.

Aldrich has also been known to tease students who ask about her

leg that “this is what happens when you don’t do your homework.”

‘Get Back to Normal’

Even though she recalls her second-grade year as “pretty normal,” Aldrich missed more school days than she was present. Her brand-new, first-year second grade teacher did all she could to include Aldrich as much as possible, making sure she missed no opportunities. Her classmates treated her much the same as they always had.

There were adjustments, to be certain. Aldrich had to learn to navigate through her classroom and her physical education classes and to learn to otherwise manage her life with one leg. Otherwise,



“that second grade year seemed as normal as it could be despite all I went through,” she said.

Her parents struggled to know how hard to push Aldrich until other parents suggested that she be signed up for t-ball. “They kind of said ‘get her back to normal. Don’t let this stop her,’” said Aldrich.

Aldrich was soon playing t-ball, an initial step toward a lifetime of athletics. “And that’s how it’s been since,” she said.

‘Didn’t Quit’

By high school, she was a starter on the freshman volleyball team – a sport that was not her first choice. She preferred golf, played during the same season at the high school level. But Aldrich figured she could play golf all summer.

It was early in her high school career that Aldrich began to find some judged her not by ability but by a perceived disability. One coach told her that because she had one leg, she was not an athlete. Looking back, Aldrich believes that coach failed to understand her prosthetic, perhaps believing it would allow her to jump higher or perform extraordinary feats.

“It was devastating, but I didn’t quit,” she said.

Approaching the end of her sophomore year, as a starter on the varsity basketball team, she was featured on the front page of the Omaha World-Herald as someone who had overcome cancer and thrived. That feature led to a connection with Omahan Brent Rasmussen, who had lost a leg in an accident. He began recruiting Aldrich to play sitting volleyball, in which players who have lost a limb or limbs play volleyball while seated on the court.

Aldrich initially questioned why she would play a disabled sport. “I had never thought I was disabled.” She eventually gave sitting volleyball a try and was hooked.

‘Blood, Sweat, Tears’

Within weeks, in March 2004, Aldrich traveled to Denver to meet with the U.S. Paralympic women’s team and coach.

“That was the first time in my sports career that I was looked at for my talent, and not for what was holding me back,” she said.

She tried out and made the U.S. team. Within weeks she was a starter and was headed to Holland for an international tournament. The team had already qualified for the Paralympics scheduled that August in Athens – the very first time the competition included women’s sitting volleyball. She was 16 years old.

For the uninitiated, the Paralympics are named such because the events “parallel” the Olympics. The Paralympics are held at the same site as the Olympics, a month later, with modified competition sites to meet the needs of athletes.

Aldrich said the 2004 U.S. team was inexperienced and did not expect to medal. The team rose to the occasion, winning bronze. Aldrich was proclaimed the competition’s top setter and ranked near the top among all players in points scored.

“Blood, sweat and tears, missing high school events, missing opportunities to be with my friends. It all paid off in the end,” she said.

‘Tooth and Nail’

It was about to get better.

By 2008, there was a near complete turnover in the U.S. team roster. The team was younger, was working harder and was more focused. Training was intensive. Aldrich was living that summer at Edmond, OK, home of the University of Central Oklahoma and the 2010 world championships. The team traveled and played extensively. Next up was the Paralympics in Beijing and U.S. team members were excited

to play the best team in the world: China.

Once in Beijing, the U.S. team fought tooth and nail, said Aldrich, to reach the gold medal match. The team went 6-3 in pool play, and then beat the rival Netherlands 3-2 to reach the finals. Unfortunately, they came up short, losing in three quick sets to China.

“I hate losing. I remember being devastated,” she said. “I was bitter because the next time I could compete on that stage was four years.”

Again, humor helped. “Women like silver jewelry,” she jokes.

A Better Mindset

As the 2012 London games approached, the team had a better mindset but the same goal: win gold. “We knew what we had to do,” Aldrich said. The U.S. team was placed in the same pool as China.

Aldrich and her teammates ended up pushing the pool play match with China to four sets, winning the first 25-22, and losing the last three 32-30, 25-23 and 25-17. The U.S. won its way back through the tournament and returned to the gold medal match. The foe once again: China.

“I remember seeing them before we walked onto the court. You could tell they were nervous to play us, and that was never the case before,” she said.

The U.S. team again won the first set, and then saw China take the final three, 25-15, 32-30 and 25-15. China had gold again, Aldrich and her teammates had a second silver. She was more frustrated than devastated.

“We were so close. I was proud of how much we had grown. I knew that in four years we would be able to beat them.”

But Aldrich would walk away from competitive sitting volleyball.

“I knew I needed to start focusing on my career and my life.”

Fortunately, again with credits to weights Coach Doscher, she chose to teach.

Social Justice Message

Today, Aldrich leads health classes at Walnut Middle School in Grand Island. Largely, her messages to students are of acceptance, of perseverance, of setting and meeting goals.

“It has always been my philosophy that if I can do anything with one leg, my kids can do anything with their two legs,” she said.

Her message is relayed in a multitude of settings, in many ways.

“No matter what you’re faced with, no matter how many obstacles or paths that you have to navigate, you can get through life, as long as you take one step at a time,” said Aldrich.

There are also other messages to deliver.

“We can be open and honest about my having one leg, what I went through. Telling them my story lets them know I’m a real person. They know I’m not going to judge them, that I just want what’s best for them,” she said. “It’s giving them a different perspective on life than what they normally see.”

“These kids know who I am as a teacher, they know who I am as an individual, and it gets them to think ‘OK, she knows what she’s talking about. She dealt with this, she’s giving a personal note to it.’”

As most teachers know, middle school can be difficult for teens.

“It’s a tough, tough couple of years,” said Aldrich. “They’re changing and they’re trying to figure out who they are as an individual, and how to fit in.”

“I just want to be honest and real with them, and prepare them for their life for their future, whatever they choose to do. And I want them to know they’re capable of anything they want to try.”

In that regard, they have the perfect role model.



Checking the work: Grand Island Education Association member Allison Aldrich checks student work during the final moments of a health class at Walnut Middle School.

Interim Studies Now Underway

Topics Include Youth Rehab Centers, ESUs, Funding, School Safety

Each year members of the Nebraska Legislature conduct studies on issues that may result in or affect legislation in coming legislative sessions. Those studies are frequently focused on education-related issues that may affect NSEA members. This year is no exception.

Two studies have been introduced to review issues at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers at Kearney and Geneva. Teachers at both sites are members of NSEA.

As with all education-related interim studies, NSEA is monitoring progress and will testify or alert affected members to testify if needed.

Testimony will be taken on the two interim studies during hearings in Geneva and Kearney on Oct. 2-3.

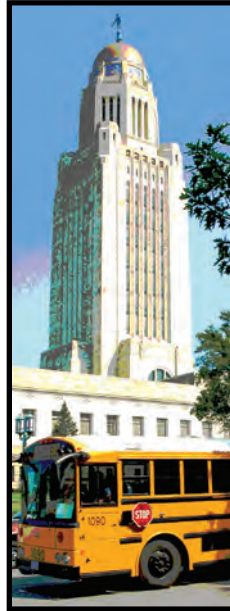
The Geneva hearing is set for the City Council Chambers at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 2.

The Kearney hearing is set for Thursday, Oct. 3, at 1 p.m. at the Nebraska Student Union on the University of Nebraska at Kearney campus.

The first study, authorized by Legislative Resolution 103, was introduced by Kearney Sen. John Lowe and will review staffing concerns and retention at both centers as well as the Beatrice State Developmental Center.

The second study, authorized by Legislative Resolution 200, was introduced by Sen. Dan Quick of Grand Island. It will examine programming provided at both centers and will also review the need for additional programming.

These studies have the potential to affect public education and have been underway since the end of the 2019 legislative session:



Nebraska Legislature '20

■ LR63, by Sen. Lou Ann Linehan of Elkhorn is examining Educational Service Units.

■ LR151, by Sen. Mike Groene of North Platte is examining the financing of public education and will develop recommendations for improving school funding. Groene chairs the Legislature's Education Committee.

■ LR152, also by Groene, is examining issues under the jurisdiction of the Education Committee.

■ LR153, again by Groene, will look at the administrative costs of local K-12 school systems and school districts.

■ LR157, offered by Sen. Wendy DeBoer of Omaha, is an in-depth review of the financing of public elementary and secondary schools.

■ LR208, by Lincoln Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks, is examining state and school district policies that relate to maintaining a safe and positive school learning environment (nine NSEA members spoke with members of the Education Committee as part of this study during a meeting at NSEA Headquarters in August).

■ LR214, by Lincoln Sen. Anna Wishart, is examining issues around the engagement, attraction and retention of youth in Nebraska.

■ LR242, offered by the State Tribal Relations Committee, is examining the replacement of Native American mascots in Nebraska at non-tribal schools.

■ LR201, by Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas, is examining the role truancy plays in the school-to-prison pipeline. The study will also look at methods that might reduce truancy.

■ LR65, offered by Seward Sen. Mark Kolterman, will provide for the presentation of reports by all political subdivisions with underfunded defined benefit retirement plans.

■ LR66, also by Kolterman, will examine the public employees' retirement systems that are administered by the Public Employees Retirement Board.

■ LR186, by Sen. Mike McDonnell of Omaha, would study the elimination of sales and use tax exemptions for goods and services.

■ LR207, by Sen. Tom Briese of Albion, would examine the possible elimination of various exemptions of goods and exclusions of services under Nebraska's sales and use tax laws.

The 2020 session of the Nebraska Legislature will convene on Wednesday, Jan. 8.

Communication Breakdown? Call Your NSEA Rep!

You Have the NSEA Edge!

No two days are alike for NSEA's 18 organizational specialists. The questions they receive from local association leaders, from association building representatives and from members are as varied and different as the Nebraska sunset. For example, this question about a communications breakdown came to an organizational specialist through NSEA's website recently:

Our administration is keeping important insurance details from us, and is not being open about our insurance deductibles. After several attempts from several members to get facts on this, we are asking for NSEA's help.

NSEA's organizational specialists offer a service not provided by any other association. When questions like the one above arise, whether asked by a single member or on behalf of an entire local association, your NSEA organizational specialist is the perfect and only person to answer the question or resolve the issue.



Organizational specialists have expertise in all phases of education. They have knowledge of Nebraska Department of Education rules and regulations, and an understanding of your school district. They know your contract, and in most cases they know your administrators. Confidentiality is standard operating procedure. Clearly, none of those benefits are avail-

able from any other association.

In the case of this particular question, your organizational specialist is also well-acquainted with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plan used by all but four Nebraska school districts.

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

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Children's Fund Gala off to Grand Start

Three Corporate Sponsors Have Pledged More than \$40,000

Final details are being reviewed and several large sponsorships have been pledged, pushing the Gala to Benefit the NSEA Children's Fund and LEARN to a great start.

By mid-September, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska had pledged \$30,000. First National Bank of Omaha had pledged \$10,000, and American Fidelity Assurance Co. had pledged \$3,000.

"We are off to a fabulous start," said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

The Gala will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the founding of the NSEA Children's Fund, and will also raise money for NSEA's second non-profit, the Leading Excellence and Robust Networks (LEARN) program.

With these corporate sponsorships secured, and with more anticipated, the time now is to ensure a full house at the Gala. More than 1,000 personal invitations have been mailed to friends of public education. There are also plenty of opportunities to give at \$100 per ticket.

"We're planning a wonderful night, with music and more," said Benson. "We would love to have lots of NSEA members and leaders celebrate the Children's Fund and LEARN."

The Gala is Saturday evening, Nov. 2, at the A View on State venue, 13467 State St., Omaha. Entertainment will include student musicians and testimonials by those helped by the Children's Fund.

While more corporate sponsorships are being sought, the at-



tention now is on sale of individual tickets, which are available for \$100 per seat, or a table of 10 for \$1,000.

The Children's Fund was organized in 1994 to help Nebraska children in need. Every teacher sees children in their classroom on a daily basis who need but cannot afford new clothing, warm clothing, eyeglasses or other basic necessities. Teachers often purchase those items from their own pocketbooks but cannot meet the needs of every child. Through the Children's Fund, Nebraska teachers have been able to make a call to NSEA, request funding for a specific item, and have a voucher or check turned around rather quickly.

LEARN was founded two years ago to provide professional development for all Nebraska teachers, not just NSEA members.

The goal of LEARN is to empower education professionals across Nebraska to provide an excellent education for every student.

Both the Children's Fund and LEARN are 501c3 non-profits. Proceeds will be shared by the two non-profits.

Corporate sponsorships to the gala are available at levels ranging from \$1,000 to \$30,000-plus. For sponsorship details contact Martha Livingston at 1-800-742-0047, or reach her at martha.livingston@nsea.org.

To purchase gala tickets, or for more information, go to:

nsea.org/gala

Warm, Clean Winter Coats; the Right Glasses; New Clothes

Children's Fund Can Make a World of Difference

NSEA members help students learn every day. They also help students be ready to learn every day, through generous giving to the Children's Fund.

Founded in 1994, the Children's Fund has one goal: to provide children with all they need to be successful at school. That might mean a new coat for a coatless child; dental work for a child in pain; eyeglasses for a child who cannot see.

Teachers often use their own cash to help these children, knowing they can't help every child. For that reason, NSEA created the Children's Fund, and continues to work to raise money.



In the past two years alone, the Children's Fund has provided nearly \$100,000 in relief.

The Children's Fund relies purely on donations from members, from local associations and from outside donors who understand the need and see the Children's Fund as a just cause.

NSEA members use the fund to help children when they see a need. NSEA members are also the biggest contributors to the fund and the fund is always in need. Consider the wonderful results from the gifts to the fund, as expressed in this letter from an NSEA member:

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

sally.bodtke@nsea.org

'Recruiting and Retention of Teachers Must be Priority'

The headline above first appeared on the editorial page of the daily McCook Gazette newspaper in a late August edition.

Through The Associated Press news service, the headline was soon repeated in daily newspapers in Grand Island, North Platte, York, Lincoln, Kearney, Holdrege and Norfolk.

That meant the NSEA's message was delivered into more than 85,000 Nebraska homes and businesses, according to circulation numbers for those newspapers. The message was first delivered to the Gazette by NSEA President Jenni Benson.

In mid-August through the first of September, Benson traveled the state to meet Association leaders, members, new educators and media across the state. One of Benson's key messages concerned the shortage of teacher education students in Nebraska colleges and universities.

"The number of students in our teacher education programs has dropped dramatically in recent years," said Benson. "We need to begin to 'grow our own' teachers, and that's what we're trying to do with Educators Rising, the Student Education Association of Nebraska and NSEA's groundbreaking Next Generation of Educators in Nebraska (NGEN) program."

A grant to NSEA from the National Education Association's Great Public Schools Fund has assisted with the development of more than a dozen new Educators Rising programs in Nebraska high schools across the state over the past three years. The grant encourages high school students to participate in the Educators Rising program and to consider teaching as a career.

Growth Spurred

Funds from that grant also assist college students in preparation for the three-part Praxis Core Academic Skills test, which students must pass in order to gain entrance to a Nebraska college of education. The NGEN program provides professional development and social activities to teachers who are in the early stages of their teaching careers.

Those combined efforts will spur growth in the number of students seeking a career in education, entering the profession and sticking with teaching as a career.

"We must grow our own teachers," said Benson. "We can't rely on others to do this for us."

Benson also spoke to editors, television and radio reporters and others about back-to-school tips, property tax issues, state aid to public schools, charter schools and voucher schemes.

Media Tour Results in Statewide Headlines



On Screen: NSEA President Jenni Benson spread the NSEA message via television air time, radio air time and newsprint during her July and August tour to news outlets across the state. Here, she visits with Eric McKay of Norfolk-based News Channel Nebraska in August.

Among those listening closely to Benson's message on 'growing' a new crop of teachers was the staff at the Gazette, and the commentary eventually spread across the state.

A 'Dire Situation'

Here is an excerpt from the Gazette's editorial following Benson's visit in mid-August:

"Grow your own" is a good idea, and we're not talking about any illegal substance.

The medical community has long found the strategy to be successful, providing rural students with scholarships and other incentives to return to their home towns or similar regions that are experiencing a shortage of trained professionals.

The educational community is facing the same crisis, and applying the same tactic to recruit and retain qualified educators.

Jenni Benson, president of the Nebraska State Education Association, visited McCook last week to make the point: we have a serious shortage on our hands.

There's been a 50 percent decrease of college students planning to head into education, about 3,000 today as compared to 7,000 a decade ago. And, nearly a third of those who do become teachers drop out of the profession within three years.

That's a dire situation considering the number of Baby Boom-generation educators ready to leave the classroom.

It's especially true in rural areas, where schools are vital to the economic health of small communities, and declining populations make it difficult to keep schools open.

In some instances, schools have literally held key positions open by bringing teachers out of retirement on a temporary basis while upcoming teachers complete their training.

Incentives can certainly help improve the teacher shortage problem, but so can organizations like "Educators Rising," an organization with 30 chapters around Nebraska working to help students on their way to becoming professional educators.

Funding for public schools is one of the main items to be affected by any changes that result from the ongoing debate over property taxes in Nebraska.

Keeping dedicated, qualified educators in the classroom must be a priority in any legitimate debate.

'We must grow our own teachers. We can't rely on others to do this for us.'

**— Jenni Benson,
NSEA President**

A Lounge for Teachers to Call Home

Palmer Educators Hope to Have Place to Meet, Relax

"We will have a real place to meet, relax, and hold meetings – I can't wait," said Palmer Education Association member and English teacher Mary Gregoski after learning she won a \$7,500 School Lounge Makeover for her K-12 building from California Casualty.

Gregoski, also the school librarian, is in her 10th year teaching for the Palmer Public Schools, located about 25 miles north of Grand Island.

"The staff deserves this for all that they do and give to students and the community," said Palmer Superintendent Dr. Joel Bohlken.

Palmer teachers currently have no designated or dedicated lounge area in which to meet or relax. They take a break or eat lunch in a small meeting room. The grant will assist in designation of a site for a lounge.

Designers from EON Office Supplies will work with the Palmer staff to add new organized storage, incorporate soothing colors and replace aging appliances. They will also develop a "flow"



Ready to Remodel: Handing over a check for the remodeling of a lounge for teachers at Palmer was California Casualty Field Marketing Manager Stephanie Whitmore, left. Next to Whitmore are, from left, Palmer Education Association member Mary Gregoski; NEA Field and Special Projects Manager Michelle Raphael; and NEA Organizational Specialist Jen Dubas.

for the designated area, maximizing staff utilization and comfort.

"We are just so grateful that California Casualty thinks about educators," said Gregoski.

She said she learned about the California Casualty offering at a recent Nebraska State Education Association event.

California Casualty created the contest in 2011 to provide educators a more conducive environment in which to take a break and share time. Palmer Public

School is the 13th school in the country to receive a School Lounge Makeover from California Casualty.

Founded in 1914, California Casualty provides auto and home insurance for educators, firefighters, peace officers and nurses across the country. Headquartered in San Mateo, CA., with service centers in Arizona, Colorado and Kansas, California Casualty has been led by four generations of the Brown family. Learn more at:

www.calcas.com

NSEA-Retired Offers Professional Learning via Book Club

Trauma-Sensitive Readings, Discussions Available to Support Educators

NSEA-Retired leadership is interested in starting a book club approach to advance professional learning.

The organization has purchased copies of the paperbacks "Fostering Resilient Learners" (elementary focused) and "Trauma-Sensitive Schools for the Adolescent Years: Promoting Resiliency and Healing," as well as resources on Managing Your Classroom with Restorative Practices.

NSEA-Retired would like to put the materials in use to support current teachers in the classroom.

According to Dr. De Tonack, NSEA-Retired president, a book club approach will be taken with the two paperbacks. The

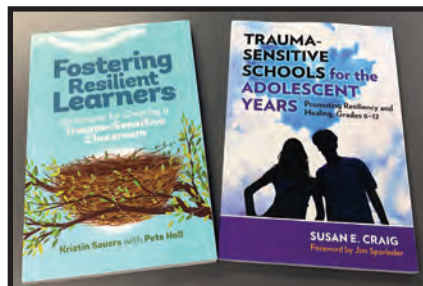
plan is to distribute groups of the books to volunteers from a school building, with those volunteers later coming together for a 90-minute discussion led by a retired volunteer and an active volunteer working together, with snacks provided by NSEA-Retired.

After the discussion, participants would be asked to return to the classroom, try a new method and discuss what seemed to work, etc., and then offer reflections in an EdCommunities group.

Tonack also proposes brief workshop sessions with the classroom management/restorative practice materials, bringing the Student Education Association of Nebraska into active involvement. Participants would receive resources to support continued learning and conversation. If

you would like to participate, contact Tonack at:

dtonack@neb.rr.com



Poll: More Funding for Public Schools

Higher Pay for Educators Also Earns Broad Support

The 51st PDK Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools finds Americans overwhelmingly support increased investment in public schools.

Six in 10 parents say their schools are underfunded, and 74 percent say they would support a strike by teachers for higher pay (state statute prohibits Nebraska public employees from striking and establishes the Commission of Industrial Relations dispute resolutions process).

The poll also finds that educators are frustrated and fed up, as 60 percent of teachers say they're unfairly paid, and 75 percent say their community's schools are underfunded.

The poll results illustrate how closely parents and educators are aligned in fighting for quality schools, and the continued importance of the recent national #RedforEd movement that has forged change in school funding and teacher pay.

"Over the past few years, hundreds of thousands of NEA members and parents have stood together for the public schools our students deserve, creating the nationwide #RedForEd movement that has won increased investment in students in states across the nation," said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García.

"And yet, while the #RedForEd movement has helped more students and educators get the support they need, today's PDK Poll should remind everyone that there is still so much more work to be done to correct years of inadequate funding of public

schools."

Key findings of the PDK poll include:

■ Six in 10 parents and all adults, and 75 percent of teachers, say their community's schools have too little money. Further, in an open-ended question, 25 percent of all adults say inadequate financial support is the biggest problem facing the public schools today. It's far and away the top-cited problem, with all other responses in single digits.

■ Seventy-five percent of teachers say the schools in their community are underfunded. Fifty-eight percent say they'd vote to strike for higher funding for school programs, and 52 percent say they'd vote to strike for greater teacher say in academic policies on standards, testing, and the curriculum.

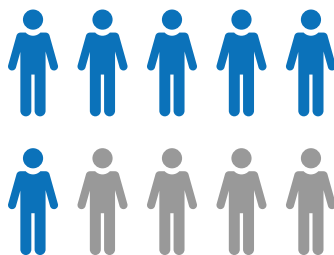
■ Parents and the public overall stand with them; 74 percent of parents and 71 percent of all adults say they would support a strike by teachers in their community for higher pay. Even more — 83 percent of parents and 79 percent of all adults — say they'd support teachers striking for a greater voice in academic policies.

■ Sixty percent of teachers say they're unfairly paid, and 55 percent say they'd vote to go on strike for higher pay.

PDK Educational Foundation has conducted an annual poll every year since 1969 to offer an independent and unbiased report of American public opinion. PDK has produced the poll every year since 1969 as part of its mission to engage educators and serve schools so that every student thrives. The poll serves as an opportunity for parents, educators and legislators to assess public opinion about public schools. Additional poll data available at:

www.pdkpoll.org

Six in 10 parents say their schools are underfunded.



Support for Teachers, Salaries Grows in Second Poll

The latest EdNext Poll was released recently, with somewhat surprising results: in terms of teacher salaries, it mirrored the 51st annual PDK poll (see story above).

What makes this poll interesting is that many researchers tied to EdNext are affiliated with far right-wing education "reform" organizations. What those researchers found was widespread support for increasing teacher pay and for federal support of public schools.

Among findings:

■ Support for teacher pay hikes is now higher than at any point since 2008. Among those provided information about current salary levels in their state, 56 percent say teacher salaries should rise — a 20-point jump over the approval level seen just two years ago, and nearly matching the 60 percent support for teacher pay increases found in the PDK Poll.

■ Free college commands the support of three in five Americans.

■ The public is more supportive of K–12 expenditures by the federal government than by state and local government. Two thirds informed of the share currently contributed by the federal

government say it should foot more of the bill.

■ A record-high percent of respondents said teachers unions have a positive effect on schools, with 29 percent saying they have a somewhat positive effect, and 14 percent saying they have a strongly positive effect. The combined 43 percent is notably higher than the previous high of 37 percent in 2017 and 2018.

■ 60 percent of all teachers and 82 percent of public school teachers who are union members said that unions have a positive effect on schools.

■ More than half of respondents — 55 percent — said that they somewhat or completely support public school teachers having the right to strike.

■ Among teachers union members, 78 percent were very or somewhat satisfied with their local union's collective bargaining activities.

■ All categories of respondents greatly overestimate the proportion of funding that comes from the federal government (average response: 28 percent, actual: 8 percent).

Learn more at:

www.educationnext.org

60 percent of all teachers and 82 percent of public school teachers who are union members said that unions have a positive effect on schools.



NSEA's October Webinar Topic: Building Positive Learning Environment

Monthly Seminar Series Designed to Enhance Classroom Practices

Educators searching for quality professional learning – from your own home! – are able to fulfill that need through a new monthly webinar series offered by NSEA.

Teaching professionals will guide discussion on classroom topics at 6:30 p.m. CT on the second Thursday of each month.

The offerings are a component of NSEA's strategic plan to provide professional growth in the profession. Utilizing the Zoom platform allows NSEA to reach teachers across the state, wherever they are most comfortable learning.

The next webinar is Thursday, Oct 10; you can register using the link www.nsea.org/webinars. The session, Building a Positive Classroom Environment, will provide strategies that increase student engagement and improve class participation to support student learning.

Moderating the session will be Kelsey Mitteis, a fourth-grade teacher and member of the Clearwater Orchard Verdigré Unified Education Association. Mitteis is also a virtual instructional coach and local association treasurer. She will be assisted by a member of the National Network of Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY). NNSTOY is helping NSEA organize the webinars.

Each month's session will be followed two weeks later, on



Mitteis

the fourth Thursday of the month, with a group coaching session and review. That gives time for participants to “test drive” the strategies learned in the first session. The group coaching session will also allow participants to ask questions, fine tune their delivery and share their successes with colleagues from across the state.

September's virtual session, Getting a Good Start: Setting Clear Expectations, Classroom Procedures and Routines, had more than 30 registrants. “NSEA is committed to providing the best learning for teachers by teachers,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson. “Using the Zoom platform allows us to reach members across the state conveniently and personally.”

Future second Thursday topics include:

- Social-Emotional Learning
- Preventing Burnout
- Working with Disruptive Students
- De-escalation Strategies
- Trauma-informed Classrooms
- Restorative Practices

For more information, call or email NSEA Organizational Specialist Dr. Cindy Copich at 1-800-742-0047, or:

cindy.copich@nsea.org



WEBINAR SERIES

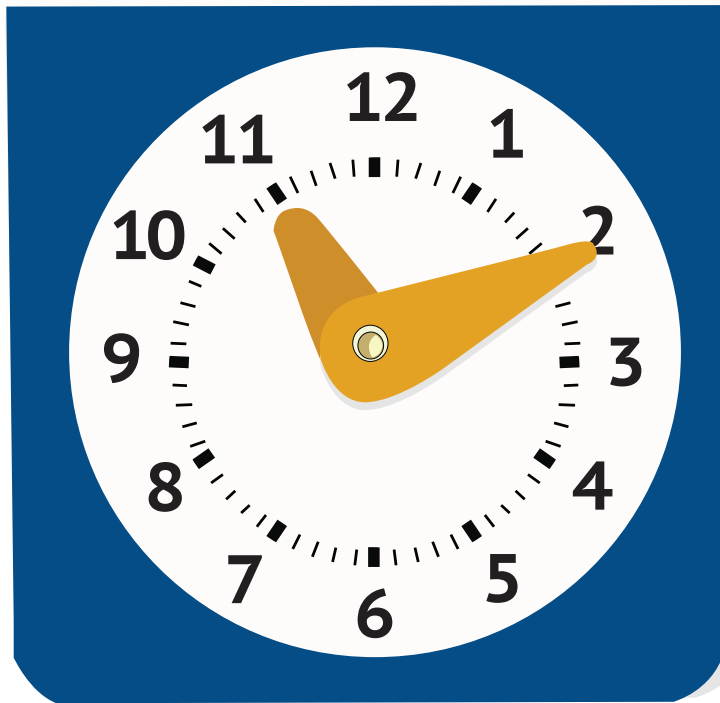
**REGISTER ONLINE AT:
WWW.NSEA.ORG/WEBINARS**



NSEA Dozen Meets in Chicago

A dozen NSEA members and employees met in Chicago in August for the EducatorVoices Conference hosted by NEA. They received training on the Every Student Succeeds Act, and information on the how and why of becoming involved in policy discussions at the local and state levels. From left are Marty Peregoy, Peru; Michelle Tebbe, Lincoln; NSEA Organizational Specialist Isau Metes; NSEA Vice President Paul Schulte, Millard; NSEA Executive Director Maddie Fennell; Jared Wagenknecht, Papillion-LaVista; State Board of Education member Patsy Koch Johns, Lincoln; Eddie Ventura, Omaha, the Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC) representative on the NSEA Board of Directors; Jake Bogus, Megan Simsic and Nebraska NEA Director Linda Freye, all of Lincoln; Jill Kimbrough, Grand Island.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT



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***Counseling/School Psychology: Spring Deadline October 15**

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LEA's Howell Earns McAuliffe Honor

Her Teaching Career 'Exemplifies Courage'

Lincoln Education Association member Stephanie Howell recalls witnessing the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger in January 1986.

She was a grade-school student sitting on the floor anticipating teacher Christa McAuliffe's historic space flight. Howell also recalls that she cried right along with her classmates and teachers.

Today, Howell is the 2019 recipient of the Nebraska Christa McAuliffe Prize for Courage and Excellence from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She is the 33rd recipient of the award, given in recognition of a teacher's courage and the lasting and positive effect they have had on their students and peers.

"Rewarding courage selects out a slightly different kind of teacher," said Dr. Gregg Wright, creator of the prize. Howell fits that mold.

The prize is awarded to a Nebraska teacher who exemplifies the character of McAuliffe, the social studies teacher/astronaut who died in the Challenger disaster. Those qualities include excellence, commitment, creativity, courage and the ability to inspire others. She receives \$1,000 and a plaque. NSEA is one of several organizations that contributed to the formation and founding of the award.

Teaching was Not First Choice

Howell did not immediately know she

wanted to be a teacher. After graduating from high school, she spent two years in the military police with the U.S. Army, followed by work as a corrections officer at the Nebraska State Penitentiary and the Lancaster County Jail.

While working these jobs, she earned her bachelor of science degree at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Education and Human Sciences. Upon receiving her Secondary Education Certification, she found her calling as a social studies teacher at Lincoln Northeast High School, turning



Howell

away from the law career she had anticipated.

In her first 10 years teaching social studies, Howell increased the pass rate in American government to one of the highest in the district. She has been an early adopter of technological tools, has focused on non-fiction writing with critical thinking skills, and has created a new peer mentoring group for students and a before-school study hall for struggling students.

For the last three years, Howell has been an embedded teacher in the Lincoln Public Schools Career Academy with a focus on psychology and government/

politics.

She has continued an emphasis on project-based assessment and service learning and has organized numerous service learning opportunities. When her students wanted to develop a service learning project involving special education students, Howell and a colleague who taught special education plunged into the unknown.

As a result of this collaboration, her colleague said, "For the first time in my teaching career, I was able to see my students being accepted by the whole community at the school."

One of Howell's students formed a true friendship with a non-communicative, wheelchair-bound student and decided that he would embark on a special education career. This friendship, in the midst of a service learning project, changed the lives of both students.

'Thinking Outside the Box'

As she thought back on her own career and on Christa McAuliffe's legacy, Howell said courage "means taking risks."

"It means thinking outside of the box and advocating for what is best for your students. Sometimes it means being willing to step outside of your comfort zone as an educator to make this happen," she said.

Howell's teaching career has exemplified this type of courage, said Wright. He called her a wonderful example of the many courageous Nebraska teachers honored over the past 33 years.



A Labor Day Show of Pride!

NSEA leaders and staff joined Omaha Education Association members, supporters and their families to celebrate Labor Day last month with a walk — the annual Labor Day Parade in Omaha. Labor Day, of course, celebrates the social and economic achievements of American workers — including education professionals!

It's Time to Plan for Delegate Assembly!

NSEA's Annual Meet Set for April 24-25

The school year is well underway, but it isn't too soon to be thinking about April 2020 and NSEA's 159th Delegate Assembly.

For the uninitiated, Delegate Assembly is the once-a-year annual business meeting of the Nebraska State Education Association. Members from across the state, representing local associations large and small, are elected to attend and manage the business and to set the future course of the Association.

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

Also scheduled for the third year in a row will be as many as 30 sessions of professional development for all members, regardless of whether they are a delegate or not.

There will also be a series of elections, with terms for the current NSEA president, vice president and one seat on the NEA Board of Directors expiring in 2020 and up for election at Delegate Assembly.

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. NSEA

Recognize a Colleague's Excellence

Now is a good time to begin discussing who you or your association might nominate for one of the honors to be given at NSEA's Delegate Assembly in April.

Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, ESP or deserving group. Mailed nominations must be postmarked by Friday, Feb. 14, 2020, and should be sent to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominations may also be submitted online, with required supporting material mailed to the NSEA. Online nomination forms are found under the 'Call for Nominations' link at:

www.nsea.org

The 2020 Delegate Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel April 24-25. NSEA members are eligible for:

■ **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2018-19 school year.

■ **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 revealed at Delegate Assembly. 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 communication within the association.

Also to be presented:

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

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

has held a Delegate Assembly almost every year since, and in some cases, twice in a year.

The 2020 Delegate Assembly is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, April 24-25, and will return to Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel

again this year.

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

Fun Numbers: Census Bureau's Statistics in Schools

Select 'Nebraska' on the Website to Discover Interesting Facts

The Statistics in Schools program offered by the U.S. Census Bureau prides itself on being an effective and free resource for teaching and learning.

Yes, it's free, and uses real-life Census Bureau data for K-12 teaching and learning.

The SIS program is broken out into five core subjects: math, geography, sociology, English and history. In addition to the five core subjects, SIS also includes a variety of resources such as Fun Facts and 5 Minute Challenge activities. State Facts for Students is an interactive resource that allows students to learn key kid-friendly demographics for their home state and find similarities and differences between their state and other U.S. states.

For example, if you select "Nebraska" under the

interactive tool, you quickly discover that Nebraska has 60 toy stores as of 2017. Additionally, you would find 4 amusement parks in the state. The data are presented in a way that will make sense to students. They are displayed in plain language and easy-to-understand terms.

Additionally, the SIS program has several interactive activities that guide students through State Facts including a scavenger hunt called "Where is Gina the Geographer?"

There are more outreach opportunities on the main Statistics in Schools website.

Remember that SIS is a free and easy-to-use resource that many educators may not know is available to them. By using these online lessons, you can find new and interesting ways to keep your students engaged using real life data, regardless of the age of the students you teach.

To learn more about the Census Bureau program, go to:

www.census.gov/schools/

Fall is Here, Winter is Near, Time Now to Plan!

Fall is here and you've finally begun to settle into a routine at work and home. But you're also noticing some kids are starting to act up and maybe you've even noticed you're struggling to maintain momentum.

Between lesson-planning, grading and parent teacher conferences, you may be feeling a bit maxed out, but the Holidays will be here before you even notice. Whether you're looking for ways to start prepping for holiday travel and shopping, or you need tips on retirement planning, NEAMB.com has tips and advice to help you make it to Winter Break. Consider:

■ Protecting yourself and your family is so important we have a new section of our site dedicated to helping you figure out how. Learn how to protect the Moments that Matter, myths about life insurance, and more resources to make sure everyone is taken care of:

www.neamb.com/protect

■ If you're planning to save time and money by doing holiday shopping online, make sure to learn how to do so safely. During National Cybersecurity Month we're going to have the information you need to make sure you are safe and secure online. Find this and more at:

www.neamb.com/finance

■ Winter is coming, so make sure your car is ready by checking out our Car Care Checklist. We also have information on the NEA Auto Buying Program, just in time for the end of the model year so that you can get the best possible deal out there. Learn more at:

www.neamb.com/car

■ Have you made sure you're saving everything you need so that you're able to enjoy your retirement when that time comes? Run the numbers on our Retirement calculators and read more about how to boost your savings by investing outside of your pension. Learn more at:

www.neamb.com/retirement

NEA Plan Helps Find Loan Debt Relief

Easy, Discounted Tool Matches Educators with Appropriate Loan Forgiveness Plans

By NEA Member Benefits

While attending a local education association meeting, Florida teacher Thomas J. Bugos II learned about a new tool to help educators manage and reduce student loan debt. He discovered he could dramatically shrink the \$32,000 in student loans he acquired while earning a master's degree.

After answering questions and putting loan details into the NEA Student Loan Forgiveness Navigator, powered by Savi, Bugos learned he was eligible for a \$5,000 loan forgiveness program, a lower income-based repayment plan and another teacher-specific forgiveness plan that would wipe out the remainder of his debt — as long as he made required payments for the next 37 months.

The result: Bugos expects to reduce roughly 70 percent of his loan burden — from about \$32,000 to just over \$8,900.

"I do not think I will ever have another impromptu meeting resulting in such a dramatic, positive change in my life," Bugos said.

He is far from alone: On average, Savi users reap more than \$1,500 a year in student loan savings by using the tool to assess whether they qualify for various federal repayment and forgiveness plans. For educators, the Teacher Loan Forgiveness and Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) programs have served as viable resources to relieve their student debt. There are also plans that can lower monthly payments based on income.

But finding the best option can get complicated, and that's where Savi steps in to lend a hand, simplify the process, and make a big impact.

Figuring Out Savings Potential

There is an abundance of information about forgiveness and repayment programs, but it's overwhelming and typically aimed at a general audience. Savi's co-founders, Aaron Smith and Tobin Van Ostern, wanted to create a streamlined, personalized and interactive approach.

"We designed the Savi platform to cut through the confusion and anxiety around student debt," Van Ostern says. "We wanted people to understand all their options — including potential forgiveness — and then make it really easy to enroll."

NEA members have special access to the NEA Student Loan Forgiveness Navigator, powered by Savi, and there is no cost to determine eligibility and potential savings. Input information about yourself and your loans, such as your income, the amount

of your monthly student loan payments, how long you've been teaching and where, and subject(s) taught. If you have an online account with a federal loan servicer, you simply provide your login. Savi will sync with the servicer and instantly populate all required loan details for you.

Savi analyzes your information and displays available repayment and forgiveness options side-by-side. For example, it knows if your school receives Title 1 funding, which can qualify you for Teacher Loan Forgiveness or Perkins Loan Teacher Cancellation.

If you opt to enroll in a forgiveness or repayment plan, Savi will populate necessary details in the right Department of Education application, saving you time and errors that could lead to delays. If you choose to file electronically through Savi, you can do so at a reduced cost of \$29.95—a savings of \$60 off the price for non-NEA members. You'll also receive ongoing advice, tools and details to help you better manage your debt.

Not All Qualify

Not everyone qualifies for income-based repayment, Teacher Loan Forgiveness or PSLF programs. However, there are still avenues to explore via the NEA Student Loan Forgiveness Navigator that can provide significant relief:

■ Consolidation allows you to combine multiple federal education loans into a single monthly payment. You can transfer variable-rate loans to fixed-interest ones, while simplifying and even lowering monthly payments by spreading them over a longer period of time. Be sure you understand the possible negative outcomes of a consolidation — including the loss of interest rate discounts, principal rebates and other borrower benefits. Savi's experts can help navigate potential consolidation avenues and explain pros and cons.

■ Deferment or forbearance lets you temporarily stop making payments or reduce the amount paid to avoid defaulting. You can pay interest as it builds up over time, or you may be able to delay this by adding it to your principal balance after the deferment/forbearance period. If you take the latter route, keep in mind that the total amount you repay over the life of a loan could increase.

Run your numbers today for free with the NEA Student Loan Forgiveness Navigator calculator and take charge of your loan debt. Learn more at:

neamb.com



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Be a Wilson



**Executive Dir.
Maddie Fennell**

“

*Kari Wilson
would never
see herself as
anything special.
She would tell
you that she
just loves her
students and
teaching.*

”

When I first started teaching, a fellow teacher shared that when he dropped his own kids off at school and watched them walk in the school door, he wondered whether their teachers knew he was entrusting them with his most precious gifts – his boys.

I never fully understood that until Darek entered my life. I'm Darek's "bonus mom" (I like that better than stepmom; too many stereotypes there).

Darek is autistic, with low cognitive functioning and a mitigated echolalia speech pattern – I just call him our little cornucopia of craziness!

D was about 8 when we met. He spent a month just kind of checking me out; he stared at me a lot and didn't talk much. The next month he would hide every time I walked in the door; he either ran from the room or would stick his head between the couch cushions.

By about the third month, there was a dramatic change. D literally crawled in my lap one day and started hugging me. He took up residence in a place in my heart that was just waiting for him.

Pretty soon we were combining households as my fiancée Bill and Darek moved to Omaha. For the first time in my life, I wasn't the teacher making phone calls to new parents, I was the parent meeting the new teacher!

As I sent him off to school that first day, I thought about my friend's words and worried about Darek. Would his teachers have patience when he repeated himself 15 times? Would his classmates make fun of him? How would we know what caused a bad day when Darek had trouble explaining things?

Omaha's Westside Community Schools did an amazing job supporting Darek. The staff at Hillside Elementary were very intentional about building an inclusive community and helping Darek make friends. At Westside Middle School Mrs. Wiechelman, a seasoned special ed teacher, was our guide as we began "the turbulent teens."

Story After Story

It was at Westside High School that Kari Wilson came into our lives. Wilson (as D calls her) was Darek's teacher all four years of high school. She was the teacher that every parent wants for their child – a consummate professional who knew her craft and loved our kid immensely.

Like many autistic children, Darek has had some major meltdowns. Those times were hard on him – and on us as parents – and I worried about what would happen if he had them at school.

One day Wilson called, telling me that Darek was having a really bad day and should probably go home. I arrived at school and found Wilson sitting on the floor at the end of the hall with Darek as he sobbed, quietly reassuring him, "It's OK bud, you'll be OK." I later found out Kari had sat with him for more than an hour, keeping him calm and just accepting his personal storm of emotions.

I often hear Darek repeating Wilson words: "Morning bud, how are you? Hey bud, let's go over here and calm down."

I could tell you story after story about how amazing Wilson is: Darek visits her at home in the summer because he just can't go months without seeing her; he watches videos with her over and over; when he missed the bus he cried "But I have to go to school, Wilson will miss me!"

A Life-Changer

But this sums it up: One night as I put Darek to bed I said, "I love you!" to which he replied, "I love Wilson!"

Kari Wilson would never see herself as anything special. She would tell you that she just loves her students and teaching.

But Kari is a life changer. She knows our son deeply, has helped him avoid his triggers and navigate the "bad days", and accepts him with a heart that seems to have no limits. She has helped Darek learn and do things his doctor told us would never be possible.

I have been blessed to teach with many Wilsons. They are life-changing teachers who knew which student needed a little more attention; consummate professionals who could modify curriculum to meet the needs of every kid, all at the same time; open hearts whose sunshine smiles were beacons in some stormy lives; educators who taught with a passionate mission.

Every day, every educator has the opportunity to be a Wilson for a kid who really needs them. To me, that's the greatest thing about being a teacher – finding that connection with a student that makes a life-changing difference.



Teacher and Student: Westside teacher Kari Wilson shares a light moment with Darek. Wilson has helped Darek learn and do things doctors thought would not be possible.

Early Retirees Can Access Health Care

EHA Plan Allows Retention of Coverage

Navigating issues that go along with early retirement can be daunting, but your health insurance questions can be made a bit easier through the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) program.

Retirees between the ages of 50 and 64 who have been insured through EHA for the five years immediately prior to retirement can continue with coverage through the EHA Direct Bill Plan. To participate in the Direct Bill plan you must be a special services member, which comes at a reduced price for NSEA-Retired members.

If you were covered under a family plan when you were an active EHA member, you may retain a family plan under the Direct Bill plan. If you had an employee plus spouse plan, you may select two single plans – one for each of you. If you select two single plans, you both must complete separate Direct Bill plan enrollment forms and each of you must be NSEA Special Service fee-paying members.

Direct Bill subscribers may change to a higher deductible plan with an effective start date of either September 1 or January 1, and must remain on the higher deductible plan for three consecutive years before they will be allowed to switch back to a lower deductible.

Deductible amounts are for a calendar year. Deadlines to request a change in deductibles were provided in letters sent from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska in July. The deadline for a Jan. 1, 2020, change request is Dec. 2, 2019. Contact Blue Cross at 1-877-721-2583 for additional details or to request change in enrollment forms.

For more details, call NSEA at 1-800-742-0047. You can also learn more at the EHA website at: ehaplan.org

Medicare Supplement Seminars

Will you sign up for Medicare soon, or do you have questions about your 2020 Educators' Medicare Supplement plan? We have some exciting news for you. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE) will host eight in-person seminars the first week of November to help answer your questions.

In addition to discussing 2020 premiums and benefits, the seminars will cover your enrollment and plan conversion options. The highlight is that BCBSNE members who are now enrolled on an Educators' Medicare Supplement plan may transition between Plan F and G, or vice versa, with no medical questions, effective Jan. 1, 2020. Additionally, future Educators' Medicare Supplement enrollees may enroll in either an Educators' Medicare Supplement Plan F or Plan G, with no medical questions if elected during the Initial Enrollment Period. Requests to change plans after Jan. 1, 2020, will include medical questions and are subject to underwriting.

If you cannot attend a seminar or would like a preview, visit the EHA website at:

ehaplan.org/retiree-info

To register for a seminar, do so no later than Oct. 25 by calling Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska at 1-800-356-3485.

Check in for morning seminars will begin at 9 a.m., with the two-hour session opening at 9:30. Check in for afternoon sessions start at 1 p.m., with sessions starting at 1:30. The sites, dates registration



Old Glory Flutters! NSEA began the school year with a U.S. flag on display, with the pole, lighting and flag provided by NSEA Retired. NSEA Organizational Specialist Mike Wiesen raised the flag as members of NSEA Retired looked on. From left are Jan Barnason, Hastings; Dee Gillham, Wheeler County; Francis Rohrich, Norfolk; Guy Roggenkamp, Grand Island; Jim McDermott, Scottsbluff; Wiesen; Art Tanderup, Neligh; President De Tonack, Lincoln; Arlene Rea and Pat Etherton, Lincoln; Carol Krejci, Roger Rea and Ruby Davis, Omaha; and Margie Nowak, Lincoln.

links are:

■ **Omaha, Friday, Nov. 1, OPS Teacher Administrative Center, 3215 Cuming St.**

Morning registration link: 2020ed-omaha-am.eventbrite.com
Afternoon link: 2020ed-omaha-pm.eventbrite.com

■ **Kearney, Tuesday, Nov. 5, ESU No. 10, 76 Plaza Blvd.**

Morning registration link: 2020ed-kearney-am.eventbrite.com
Afternoon link: 2020ed-kearney-pm.eventbrite.com

■ **Lincoln, Wednesday, Nov. 6, Southeast Community College, 8800 O St., Rooms U-102, 104 & 106.**

Morning registration link: 2020ed-lincoln-am.eventbrite.com
Afternoon link: 2020ed-lincoln-pm.eventbrite.com

■ **Norfolk, Thursday, Nov. 7, Northeast Community College Lifelong Learning Center, 801 E. Benjamin Ave.**

Morning registration link: 2020ed-norfolk-am.eventbrite.com
Afternoon link: 2020ed-norfolk-pm.eventbrite.com

— De Tonack, NSEA-Retired President

Fall Conference at Kearney: Registration is Now Open!

The 2019 NSEA-Retired fall conference will be Tuesday, Oct. 15, at the Kearney Ramada Inn. Registration and refreshments begin at 8:15 a.m., with the program beginning at 9 a.m. Participation is free to members and \$10 for guests.

An optional evening gathering will be Monday, Oct. 14, 7 p.m., at McCue's Taproom, 2008 Avenue A, with pizza provided.

The conference will feature "Nebraska's Musical Smorgasbord: Music from Various Ethnic Groups in Nebraska" and "Nebraska Game and Parks: Its Stories, Challenges and Educational Efforts." Breakout sessions include travel tips, investment wisdom, common sense self-defense, working with trauma sensitive students, and EHA & BCBS insurance discussions.

Registration is now open at nsea.org/19retiredfallconference. For details, contact Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

Jablonski Selected to Lead EHA Board

Educators Health Alliance Board Selects NSEA Comptroller, Assist. Exec.

Sheri Jablonski, NSEA's associate executive director and comptroller, has been selected to chair the Educators Health Alliance Board of Directors.

Jablonski was elected by the 12-member board in August. She succeeds Neal Clayburn, who retired as NSEA associated executive director in August. Clayburn chaired the EHA board for the past 10 years.

The Educators Health Alliance is a non-profit corporation that was created to procure quality, affordable health care insurance for Nebraska educational employees. The rates set by the EHA Board are for the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska (BCBSNE)

health care plan used by more than 400 public school district and affiliate groups in the state. The plan is governed by a 12-member board representing the Nebraska Association of School Boards (NASB), the Nebraska Council of School Administrators (NCSA) and the NSEA. More than 80,000 Nebraskans are covered by the plan, making it the largest health plan in the state

Beth Kernes Krause, representing the NASB, was elected vice chair. She is a member of the Auburn Public Schools Board of Education. Virgil Harden, business manager for the Grand Island Public Schools, was elected secretary. Harden represents the NCSA.



Jablonski

Tobias Added to NSEA Board Roster

Emily Tobias, a member of the Sargent Education Association, has been appointed to the NSEA Board of Directors, effective with the start of the new Association year on Sept. 1.

Tobias fills the NSEA Sandhills District position on the board left vacant with the retirement of longtime board member Marina Garner of Hyannis.

Tobias is the president of the Sargent Education Association and serves on the SEA's negotiations team. She has served as secretary of the Sandhills District Board of Directors for several years.

She earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Kearney with a major in vocational business and a minor in cooperative education-diversified occupations. She has a master's of education degree in curriculum and instruction and a K-12 information technology endorsement.

She teaches middle school reading and English, information technology and is the school yearbook advisor and technology integration specialist. She is in her seventh year of teaching at Sargent. Prior to joining the Sargent faculty, she taught at Arcadia for five years.



Tobias

Extended Liability for Nurses, ADs, Now **Free** with Membership

NEA has just announced that Association members previously eligible for extended liability coverage through the MRA program are no longer required to pay an additional premium and/or register for the benefit. The Medical & Related Arts expanded liability coverage is especially important to school nurses and those faculty at community colleges who train staff and students on medical procedures.

"The change means the coverage will now be automatically received by anyone who is enrolled as an Active member," said Jenni Benson, NSEA president. "This additional coverage is a tremendous benefit to those members who need it."

Benson said any NSEA member who has already paid for the 2019-20 coverage will receive a refund.

Shirley Jensen

Shirley Jensen, 82, a lifetime member of NSEA, died Aug. 30, 2019, at her home.

Born in Alabama, she graduated from high school in Delaware and earned a degree in education at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. She taught in Alabama before moving to Nebraska, where she earned her vocational endorsement at Wayne State College. She taught at Wakefield and then for 34 years at Randolph, retiring in 1997.

Husband, Marvin, a son and four grandchildren survive.

Nicki Markut

Nicki Markut, 45, a Waverly Education Association member, died Aug. 11, 2019, after a battle with cancer. A Shenandoah (IA) High graduate, she graduated from Doane College in 1996 with a degree in elementary and special education. She earned a master's in special education from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1999.

She taught 23 years at Waverly and was a vocal advocate for students. She served on the board of the Nebraska Educational Technology Association, presented and sponsored student contest entries. She recruited students to help with Special Olympics.

She is survived by her parents, boyfriend, two siblings, nieces, nephews. Memorials to NSEA's Children's Fund.

Marilyn Ahrens

Marilyn Ahrens, 89, died at Deshler on Aug. 18, 2019.

Ahrens was a native of the Pilger area, and after completing normal training taught at rural schools in Stanton and Seward counties. Following a break to get married and start a family, she returned to teaching at Carleton in 1962. She soon earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and then taught at Edgar Elementary for the Sandy Creek Public Schools until her retirement in 1995. She was a member of the NSEA and the Hastings Area Retired Teachers Association.

She was preceded in death by her husband of 63 years, Donald. Two daughters and their children survive.

Word-Level Reading Seminar Set for Omaha

Dyslexia Association Hosts Dr. David Kilpatrick

One of the leading educators in learning disabilities and educational psychology will provide an all-day seminar on word-level reading difficulties in Omaha later this year.

The Nebraska Dyslexia Association, along with the Friends of the Nebraska Dyslexia Association, are offering the seminar with Dr. David Kilpatrick, on Monday, Dec. 9.

Kilpatrick is a professor of psychology for the State University of New York College at Cortland. He will present on *Recent Advances in Understanding Word-Level Reading Difficulties: Assessment and Highly Effective Intervention*.

His Omaha seminar will focus on how children learn to read words and why some children struggle. Studies consistently show that the most commonly used reading programs provide limited benefits for weak readers. However, other studies demonstrate that some approaches yield substantial gains in reading for such students, and these will be the focus of the presentation.

There is a \$75 registration fee for non-NDA members. Members will pay \$60. Schools purchasing a group rate of \$300 for five tickets will receive a one-year NDA membership. Registration deadline is Nov. 15. Register online at:

davidkilpatrick.eventbrite.com

For more details, go to:

nebraskadyslexia.org

Kilpatrick is a state-certified psychologist with 28 years of teaching experience. He has been teaching courses in learning disabilities and related topics since 1994. He is also a reading researcher and is the author of two books on reading, *Essentials of Assessing, Preventing and Overcoming Reading Difficulties*, and *Equipped for Reading Success*. He is co-editor of a third book, *The Science of Reading Development and Reading Difficulties: Bridging the Gap Between Research and Practice*.

Speaking of Education

"Education is our best homeland defense."

— Vice Admiral Joe Sestak, USN, Ret; former Congressman

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

Class Autobiographies for the Student Teacher

From Claudia Pitchford, an education student in Illinois:

"This tip is something I saw done for a fellow student teacher. The host teacher put together a class autobiographical notebook to give to the student teacher on her first day. The notebook contained a picture of the teacher that was glued to a letter welcoming the student teacher to her classroom and a little about herself. The teacher had all of the students do the same. This helped the student teacher quickly put faces and names together. Her first day was a little easier, since she felt like she already knew something about each of the students and their teacher before she started."



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



New Lincoln Members! Just as school was getting underway, these Lincoln educators joined their professional association through the Lincoln Education Association at a luncheon for new teachers. From left are Clinton Elementary School first grade teacher Ashley Goosic; Southeast High special education and English teacher Jessica Bui; Irving Middle School special education teacher Evan Lindblad; and Goodrich Middle School special education teacher Toni Kemerling.