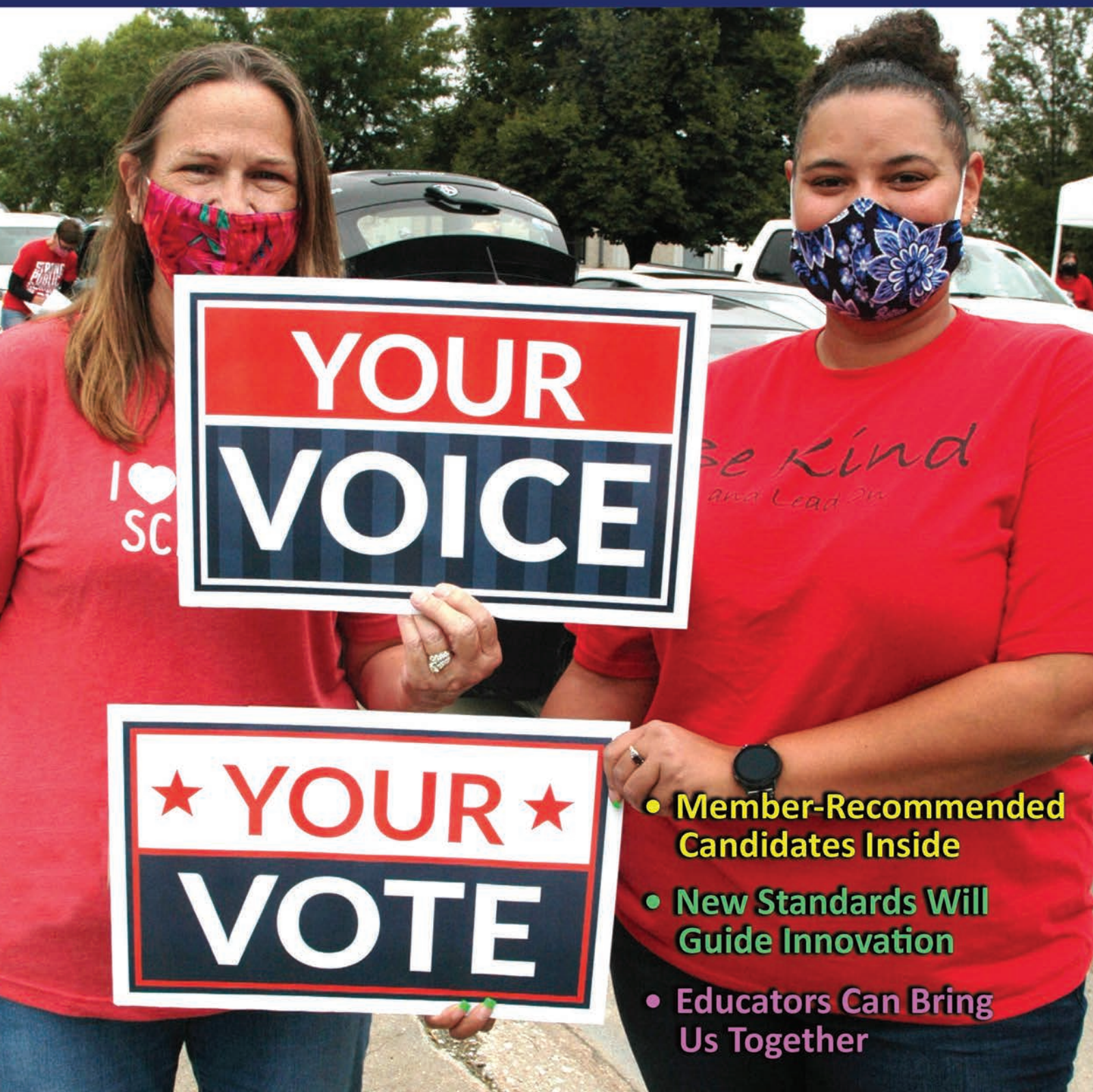


The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • October 2020



- Member-Recommended Candidates Inside
- New Standards Will Guide Innovation
- Educators Can Bring Us Together



THE VOICE

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Plans Now Underway for NSEA's 160th Assembly

NSEA's Annual Meet Set for April 23-24

The school year is well underway, but it isn't too soon to be thinking about April 2021 and NSEA's 160th 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 set the future course of the Association.

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

While last year's event was virtual and did not include the robust professional development of the previous two years, it is hoped that the event will return to an in-person format. A decision in that regard will be made early in 2021.

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

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

The 2021 Delegate Assembly is scheduled for Friday and Saturday, April 23-24, and will return to Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel.

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

Recognize a Colleague's Excellence

Now is the time to discuss 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. 12, 2021, 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 2021 Assembly will be held at Lincoln's Marriott Cornhusker Hotel April 23-24. Members are eligible for:

■ **NSEA Rookie of the Year:** To honor a first-year teacher who excelled in the 2019-2020 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 the 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 internal communication.

Also to be presented:

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

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

NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

On the Cover: Cecilia Shultz, Westside Education Association, and Faith Johnson, Omaha Education Association, send a clear message during a campaign sign drive-through event in Omaha in September. See the story on page 11.

Something to Agree On



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“
We may not
agree on
every political,
pedagogical or
personal issue,
but we can all
agree that every
Nebraska child
deserves the very
best education
and opportunity
we can provide.
”

School is in full swing across Nebraska, which means my windshield time piled up over the last month.

In fact, I feel like I could sing the names of Nebraska communities in the classic traveling song, *I've Been Everywhere*, first made famous in the U.S. by Hank Snow. The chorus in my version would go something like this:

*“I've been to Arapahoe, Lexington, Cozad, Alma
“Omaha, North Platte, Norfolk, Ogallala
“Scottsbluff, Maxwell, Palmer, Kenesaw...”*

You get the idea. Lots of seat time, lots of opportunities to talk with members about the issues they deal with each day.

The most recent highlight as I write this was a member gathering in Scottsbluff at an amazing pop-up drive-in theatre consisting of three steel cargo containers stacked atop one another with a screen hanging from the top. I was fortunate to be able to visit every car, chat with members, their children and get to know and thank them before they watched the inspiring classic, *Freedom Writers*. It was a nice crowd and I enjoyed the social distancing way to connect.

I shared memories of my childhood drive-in theater experiences with some of those on hand. My Mom, my Dad and I and my two brothers would pile in the family station wagon and drive from our home in Sutherland to North Platte. Along with other kids, we would play on the playground, silhouetted by the big screen until it got dark. We would watch the trailers and the cartoons and then get our pajamas on and lay down in the back while our parents watched the grown-up movie.

It was a simpler time for sure. My parents didn't go to the playground to watch us. They told us what to do and we did it. We knew if we failed to follow their instructions, we'd be staying with our grandparents the next time the family went to the drive-in.

Sometimes I long for such a simpler time.

Deeper Significance

As I settled in my car to watch the movie, I enjoyed my hot dog and the very best popcorn from the

nearby food trailer. Many of you know that *Freedom Writers* is the story of a young teacher who inspires her class of at-risk students to learn about tolerance, and to apply themselves and pursue education beyond high school. I had watched the movie years ago and had even met the young teacher portrayed – Erin Gruwell – at a professional development session in Lincoln.

As I watched this time, I felt *Freedom Writers* had a different, deeper significance, particularly in-light of current events. How personal it suddenly became. I now have eight multi-racial grandchildren growing up in these very unsettled times. There is a great deal to learn and to teach them as we are on this journey together.

How we respond to movies, media, family and friends is central to our own experiences. Sadly, it seems as if we do more to tear each other down than we do to build each other up.

'A Light in a Dark Room'

My goal as the NSEA president, representing 28,000 educators across Nebraska, is to build bridges through relationships and clear communication. We may not agree on every political, pedagogical or personal issue, but we can all agree that every Nebraska child deserves the very best education and opportunity we can provide. It is clearly

our responsibility to be leaders in that regard.

In *Freedom Writers*, Gruwell's class read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and studied the Holocaust. When the students learn that Miep Gies, the Dutch woman who risked her life to keep Frank's family hidden, is still alive in the Netherlands, they embark on a fund raiser to bring her to their class as a guest speaker. It is the highly emotional highlight of the film. Visibly moved by the courageous stories of this now-elderly woman, the students instantly see her as a hero.

"I was not a hero," she says. "I was an ordinary person. All I did was do the right thing. But you are heroes every day. You are turning on a light in a dark room."

That statement is true of every teacher in Nebraska, as well. Thank you for turning on that light for our state's children.



Association Swag: NSEA President Jenni Benson hands a bag with pens, sticky notes and other NSEA items to member Sarah Salinas during a drive-in movie event in Scottsbluff.

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New DHM Puts Educators, Kids at Risk

NSEA: Sept. 1 Order to Relax Quarantine Requirement Endangers Educators, Kids

When, on Sept. 1, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services officially modified a previous Directed Health Measure aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, NSEA leadership was aware something was in the wind.

Connections in the education family had indicated DHM changes of an unknown nature were to be unveiled, perhaps as late as Sept. 9. Yet when the update was simply posted on the DHHS website – without formal announcement or fanfare – it was a bit of a jolt.

Buried in the update was a paragraph that essentially exempted school employees from certain quarantine directions applicable to others in the community. While the measure essentially made education employees “critical employees,” no other employment category was mentioned.

The change essentially lowered the quarantining standards for education employees who have had close contact with a person who has tested positive, or who has a COVID-19 test pending and is symptomatic.

“This change to quarantining protocols will put children, teachers and other school staff at risk,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

Just as jarring was the fact that educators were not at the table as the modified health measure was discussed and debated. The

top-heavy decision-making and low-key reveal also caused confusion, as school districts across the state interpreted the modified DHM differently.

“This is the kind of chaos you get when you do not have our teacher professionals at the table,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson. “This puts more pressure on our teachers and school staff who are already struggling to do all they can to protect the health and safety of students, themselves and families.”

Following the update, NSEA began researching legal issues surrounding the directed health measure, and quickly released guidance on how to respond to common scenarios facing school employees under the revised directed health measure and federal regulations. Every member received an email with a link to a three-page pdf discussing the DHHS missive.

Benson and Executive Director Maddie Fennell, along with attorneys from the NSEA-retained firm of Norby and Welding, LLC, offered questions and answers regarding the directed health measure in a video posted to the NSEA website (see link in box).

In the email message to members, Benson said this was among the top recommendations: do *not* sign a waiver offered by school administration without first contacting your local association leadership or your NSEA organizational specialist. If you have already signed such a waiver and are concerned, contact your organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.

COVID-19 Guidance for Educators

NSEA members can find the recent ‘Guidance on COVID-19 Directed Health Measures’ article, and much more, at:
nsea.org/COVID19



Now required: Omaha Education Association member Cat Green teaches at the Dr. J.P. Lord School for medically fragile, non-verbal students. Teachers at the school are now required to wear masks, gloves, face shields and gowns as they teach.

The NSEA guidance also stated that “it is important to note that nothing within the DHM limits your unconditional right to a COVID-19 test or to seek the advice of your health care provider.”

Quarantine Housing Open to Educators

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Nebraska Department of Education, has opened the Nebraska Accommodation Project, designed to provide temporary housing for any Nebraskan as a result of COVID-19 exposure.

The program provides short-term housing for quarantine and/or isolation locations outside of any Nebraskan’s usual household in order to protect a household member with a health condition that puts them at high risk from exposure to COVID-19. The program includes a specific application link for educators.

To qualify, educators must be a state resident employed by a Nebraska school, must be physically working on a school campus and come in contact with children on campus daily. Applicants must also have a full-time cohabitant with a high-risk medical diagnoses and no alternative living situation outside their permanent residence.

Placement is in a local hotel within 24 hours of application. There is no charge, as long as the guest does not violate program policies. Employers are *not* notified of the temporary housing situation.

The program also offers an application link for healthcare workers and first responders.

Those Nebraskans who test positive for COVID-19 must remain at the selected quarantine site for at least 72 hours after fever has passed without the use of medicine and at least 10 days after symptoms first appeared.

Those Nebraskans who were exposed in a closed space for more than 15 minutes with a COVID-19-positive person, but who do not show symptoms, must remain at the hotel or site until COVID-19 test results arrive.

Health care workers, first responders and educators can travel to and from work only. Other Nebraskans are limited to on-site until test results arrive. For details, go to:

dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/Nebraska-Accommodation-Project.aspx

Contact Tracing Process Firmed Up

The Nebraska Association of Health Directors has released a summary of the PreK-12 contact tracing process that essentially defines the process statewide. To review the process, look for the ‘School Setting Contact Tracing Procedure’ item at:
nsea.org/COVID19



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Educators Called Upon to Bring People Together



**Edward T. Ventura Jr.,
Chair, NSEA
Ethnic Minority
Affairs
Committee**

“

*Imagine when
there is no
school-to-prison
pipeline because
we, as a union,
ensure that every
member
has the tools
to challenge
their own
implicit biases.”*

”

Edward T. Ventura Jr. sits on the NSEA Board of Directors as the elected representative of the Association's Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, which he also chairs. He is the librarian for Chandler View Elementary School in Omaha and is in his 21st year of teaching. His late wife Ernestine was an elementary school teacher for 25 years. He delivered these remarks at a social and racial justice gathering in Omaha this past summer.

By Edward Ventura, Chair, NSEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee

I am of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and Latino heritage. My siblings and I were the first Latinos to attend our Irish Catholic school. My brothers and sisters did not like the school and switched to public school by fifth grade. I enjoyed it overall, but by my senior year was ready to be around Latinos.

I credit high school counselor Barb Tacke with connecting me to New Mexico Highlands University in Las Vegas, NM. I spent my college years there and my first roommate was Black. I was stunned by the hatred some in Las Vegas had toward Blacks. Most of my roommate's friends were Black and they stuck together. My worst memory is that of holding a Black student-athlete's head while he lay on a bench in the park after he was attacked by members of a local fraternity. He left school and never returned.

All these years later, my question today is this: Will we fight for justice for all children? And how will you fight?

My K-12 schooling was filled with White teachers who were good people but had a lack of knowledge and love for my culture that made me feel my culture was an afterthought. That is why I seek open and ongoing discussion on matters that affect ethnic minority educators and ethnic minority students.

As chair of the NSEA Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee, I am better able to work to end the school-to-prison pipeline, to strengthen immigration reform, increase diversity in schools, close the achievement gap, support English Language Learners, and to reduce the horribly high dropout rate among ethnic minorities.

Responsive, Reflective Curriculum

Imagine a day when every student learns about Juneteenth and the Trail of Tears, Wong Kim Ark, Sylvia Mendez, and Stonewall—a culturally responsive and reflective curriculum

that tells every student in America that they are seen. As an elementary school librarian, I want—and my students need—stories that reflect their own experiences. I am working to make this a reality in my library.

Yet none of us can do this work alone. It will take the collective power of educators and our allies to uproot the inequality that has become entrenched in every American ZIP code. In the darkest times of injustice in our country, there have been brave, ordinary people who stood together to say “No. This is not right. I'm ready to do something about it.”

The fight for social justice, advocacy, professional development, coalition-building—it all matters. My question is this: What will you do?

‘Called Upon to Act’

Educators are public servants. By the nature of our work, we are called upon to act. What can you do for your colleagues; your students; the families you love; your community? Again, I ask: What will you do? Here are ideas you might consider:

- Ask your principal for professional development devoted to race and racial issues.
- On your own, find such professional development in your community.
- Work to create a safe space within your school.
- Talk with colleagues about these issues.
- Do not sugarcoat such issues for students. Make it age appropriate, but truthful.
- Teach students an accurate history that reflects all students in your classroom.
- Review your district's Student Code of Conduct with an eye to examining biases.
- Encourage and celebrate all ethnic or religious ceremonies in school.
- Encourage—at all levels—more teachers into the profession who reflect the student body. Encourage students of color to consider teaching as a profession.
- Allow students the opportunity to see themselves as successful!
- Make sure you have a colleague or friend to hold you accountable.
- Fight for underrepresented students.
- Above all, lead by example.

NSEA is committed to racial and social justice. We work to give educators opportunities to reflect on practice and to plan how to build into lessons what they learn about the lives and needs of diverse students.

NSEA offers many learning opportunities for

educators – check the NSEA website (nsea.org) to learn more. Most of the opportunities are offered via Zoom conversations and webinars. The NSEA trainings earn high marks and I encourage you to participate.

If you accept some of these suggestions, someday when you are asked what you did when your country needed you, you will have a powerful answer: I was part of the collective voice and collective power that refused to be silent.

In July, during the National Education Association's Representative Assembly, speakers talked about the need for change. Some of their thoughts are paraphrased here:

"Throughout American history, those in power have worked the system to make sure they retained power. Opportunity for others has always been deemed a threat to their bottom line. When in the history of our country can you go back to when it was better for African Americans? When was it better for women? When was it better for immigrants or the poor or Native Americans or LGBTQ people or Latinos or Asians or Pacific Islanders or any people of color?

"Imagine the day when a student no longer wonders why some schools have classes in robotics, artificial intelligence and coding while others can barely find a Bunsen burner or broadband connection. Imagine when there is no school-to-prison pipeline because we, as a union, ensure that every member has the tools to challenge their own implicit biases."

We Will Continue to Work!

As a parent and an American, I hope one day we will wake up to say that the first form of a just society a child experiences is in their public school, and that their educators made it so. We must continue to play an active role, ensuring that our #RedforEd movement stands in solidarity with all movements demanding racial, social, economic, and climate justice. And it will take this kind of socio-political movement power to disrupt systems in our country that aren't working for the vast majority of Americans. Finally, remember to register to vote!

NSEA will continue to work to bring people together, identify problems and find solutions. Please join us in that effort.

Blue Cross Reminds Membership of No-Cost COVID-19 Benefits

Provider Waives Fee for Tests, Treatment

NSEA members who utilize the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska health care plan through the Educators Health Alliance, are reminded that the health care provider will waive costs for *medically necessary* in-network testing and treatment of COVID-19.

All but four Nebraska school districts utilize the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska plan.

In a flyer, the health care provider said that "Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska will waive costs for medically necessary in-network testing and treatment of COVID-19. We encourage the use of in-network providers for COVID-19 testing and treatment. In-network providers will never ask for upfront payment for COVID-19 testing or treatment."

The company also urged plan members to learn more at:

nebraskablue.com/coronavirus

The company also offered these tips for protecting yourself and others from COVID-19:

■ Wash your hands often. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use hand sanitizer if soap is not available.

■ Practice social distancing. Limit close contact with others and remember people without symptoms may be able to spread the virus.

■ Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face covering when around others. This is especially important when social distancing is difficult to maintain.

■ Clean and disinfect. Frequently touched surfaces such as cell phones, laptops, keyboards, doorknobs, etc., should be disinfected often.

■ Cover coughs and sneezes. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow.

To learn more or to find a test site, consult your doctor or visit:

TestNebraska.com



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New Standards will Guide Innovation Through Disruption

Teacher, Principal Performance Standards Support Educators in Addressing Equity

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

With the COVID-19 pandemic, our nation's educators are traversing unprecedented territory, leading to difficult situations and tough, many times unanswerable, questions. New necessary protocols have disrupted the routines teachers have used successfully for years. This disruption to "normalcy" has teachers feeling isolated and vulnerable.

The ability to learn, unlearn and relearn (Toffler, 2019) is an uncomfortable process requiring knowledge, time, reflection, courage, risk taking, patience, forgiveness and feedback from people who want to see success. Great teachers think innovatively. Never before has this ability to innovate been more important. This is the time for districts to elevate and support teachers' willingness to think differently and lean into the discomfort of innovation in front of their students, parents and colleagues, to meet everyone's needs, including their own.

What can Nebraska's statewide educational system do to ensure teachers have access to the support and development they need to succeed in today's classroom and continue to grow in their profession? This question must be answered...and soon!

Adapting best practices in Nebraska's new educational "normal" is vital for teachers to be successful. Educational organizations in Nebraska must collaborate to provide the critical support Nebraska's teachers need to react innovatively in the face of disruption. All educators, regardless of district, location or organization, must ask themselves: "If the pandemic ended tomorrow, would we revert to pre-pandemic practices and protocols, or capitalize on the forced evolution of districts to better meet the needs of Nebraska's students?"

Proactive Response Required

The pandemic has exposed a crisis in Nebraska's education system in the form of inequity that existed long before COVID-19 brought it to the surface. Student marginalization and institutional bias continue to permeate the education system in Nebraska, and the country. How educators respond to this crisis today will have a significant impact on the future of education.

Rather than simply reacting to barriers presented, leaders and teachers must proactively respond by creating and implementing systems of support that leverage innovation to meet the broad-ranging student needs magnified by Covid-19. Educational

stakeholders must act, through unified efforts, to transform the current barriers into stepping stones that lead to the recognition of inequity and the redefining of systems responsible for it.

Support for schools to build a school culture in which attitudes and dispositions are more justice minded and equity driven is critical. Teachers and principals must have the ability and necessary supports to address institutional biases that place barriers in front of students, whether intentional or unintentional. A courageous undertaking of this magnitude is impossible without a willingness to work together.

Organized, Intentional Collaboration

In April 2020, the Nebraska State Board of Education made a commitment to a common language of effectiveness for all Nebraska school teachers and leaders by approving revisions to the Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Standards (NTPPS). These standards provide a structure designed to address the complexities of teaching and leading. The Nebraska Department of Education is committed to organized and intentional collaboration with key partners to develop and implement a system using these standards as the foundation to support the educational community in addressing equity in schools. The system is called Supporting Educator Effectiveness through Development (S.E.E.D.).

The NTPPS were developed pre-pandemic; however, the themes and expectations hold true in post-COVID-19 schooling. These themes, leveraged throughout the standards, seek to realize equitable opportunities for each student:

- Equity and data-based decision making.
- Statewide common language.
- Knowledge and skills for effective teachers and principals.
- Staff support and development.
- Family and community engagement.

The next article in this series will delve more deeply into these themes. A link to the new standards and a site to ask questions can be found here:

education.ne.gov/educatoreffectiveness/

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

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

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



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



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



**Ryan Ricenbaw,
NDE Leadership
and Learning
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Nov. 3: An Election with Meaning

'As Long as Politicians Set Policy for Teaching, Educators Must be Active'

Every time Election Day rolls around, it seems to be characterized as "the most important election in recent memory."

Given the sharp political division in our country, the danger of the pandemic and the years-long assault on public education, that characterization exactly fits the Nov. 3 General Election.

For educators, it is most important to vote for candidates who will support public education, said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

"As long as politicians set policy for teaching, educators must be active in the political arena," she said.

Elected politicians affect all that goes on in a public school, from curriculum to safety to school funding and discipline, said Benson.

In each election cycle, NSEA assembles politically balanced teams of members who interview candidates and review questionnaires submitted by the candidates in advance. Team members then select the candidate they believe most qualified for election, based purely on education issues. These pages reflect that process for 2020.

"We ask that you consider voting for NSEA's recommended candidates," said Benson. "But above all, we ask that you vote."

Voting, however, will be historically different this cycle. Every registered voter in Nebraska should have by now received a request for an early voting ballot. To vote in this manner, early ballot requests must be returned to your county election clerk no later than 6 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 23. The earlier those requests are mailed, the more likely they will be received by the county election clerk on time.

Once you receive your ballot in the mail, it must be completed and returned to your county election office by mail or by hand delivery by the close of polls on Election day.

"Request your ballot, vote from the security of your own home," said Benson. "Contact your county election office if you have questions about the process."

Nebraska Legislature

Janet Palmtag, District 1

Otoe, Johnson, Nemaha, Pawnee, Richardson counties.

"My first priority will be to fully fund the state aid formula," said Palmtag in response to the first query on NSEA's candidate questionnaire, "If elected, what is your primary initiative to ensure that all Nebraska students have access to a well-funded, quality public school?" She said higher teacher pay is key to attracting and retaining high-quality teachers. She supports collective bargaining and due process; opposes charters; and would seek an Education Committee seat.

Palmtag began in insurance in 1984 and now owns a multi-office



The Candidate: NSEA member Tim Royers was busy at a campaign sign pickup event at the Omaha Education Association office in mid-September. More than 500 cars passed through the event as members and the public picked up signs to support about 20 Association-recommended candidates. Royers is a candidate for Legislative District 31.

Remember, a candidate's stance on federal defense spending or flood management does not enter into consideration. **It's about education.** So, with Nov. 3 near, please review these NSEA-recommended candidates, and vote for public education!

agency operating in Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. A University of Nebraska-Lincoln grad, she is on the UNL President's Advisory Committee and is past chair of the state's Economic Development Commission. NSEA members from Nebraska City, Syracuse, Auburn, Peru and Salem said she is "well-respected, sincere, open, down-to-earth."

Sen. Carol Blood, District 3

A section of north central Sarpy County that includes parts of Bellevue and Papillion.

Blood is a "farm girl" and is from a family of educators and has been supportive of teachers and public education during her first

LEG. DIST 1



Janet Palmtag

LEG. DIST 3



Sen. Carol Blood

LEG. DIST 7



Sen. Tony Vargas

LEG. DIST 9

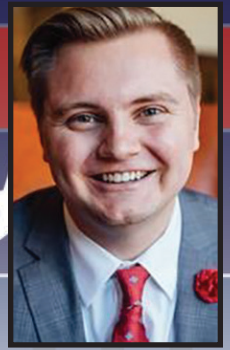


John Cavanaugh

LEG. DIST 11



Terrell McKinney

LEG. DIST 13**Sen. Justin Wayne****LEG. DIST 15****Sen. Lynne Walz****LEG. DIST 17****Sheryl Lindau****LEG. DIST 19****Former Sen.
Mike Flood****LEG. DIST 21****Brodey Weber**

term. The interview team that reviewed her candidacy four years ago called her “honest, passionate, organized, research-based and relatable.” She has been all of that and more.

Blood served on the Bellevue City Council for eight years before joining the Legislature. In 2017, she received the Holland Children’s Movement Honor Roll Award. She is a past CEO of the LaVista Chamber of Commerce. She introduced and saw passage of LB15, which requires insurance plans to provide children in need with a hearing aid. This year, she carried LB751, which acknowledges mental illness as equivalent to physical and behavioral issues that affect student attendance. NSEA supports both.

Sen. Tony Vargas, District 7

Omaha, south of I-480, East of Highway 75 and south to the Sarpy County line.

A former public school teacher in his native New York City, Vargas has interests of kids at heart. He is executive director of the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance and is a former member of the Omaha Board of Education. His focus is on equity in education, technology and innovation and college affordability. On the Appropriations Committee he led efforts to prioritize state funding to support the most vulnerable Nebraskans, especially those from low-income backgrounds.

This year, he offered a bill to create the offense of sexual exploitation of a student (LB1210); a bill to provide panic buttons in classrooms statewide (LB1156); a bill for a state food insecurity nutrition incentive grant program (LB1040); and a bill to move administration and operation of the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers to the Department of Health and Human Services from the Department of Administrative Services. NSEA supported those efforts.

John Cavanaugh, District 9

East-central Omaha roughly from I-480 to 72nd, bounded on the north by Highway 6 and Leavenworth St. and on the south by Grover and Martha streets.

The seven members who met with District 9 candidates called Cavanaugh a “strong campaigner” with a robust organization and a reputation as a life-long-learner. Cavanaugh has been an assistant public defender for the past seven years — good experience he says for standing up for the rights of people, and for cross examining people, “which will come in handy in the oversight role of the Legislature.

“Until teachers do not have to purchase school supplies for their classrooms, we can never say school funding is adequate. We should strive for much more than that,” he said.

Terrell McKinney, District 11

An irregularly shaped district north of downtown Omaha.

The six NSEA members who interviewed McKinney found that he understands the needs of public education for his North Omaha

district; that he has values aligned with the NSEA strategic plan; and that he has the potential to motivate diverse and young voters.

McKinney has a bachelor’s degree in sports business management from Maryville University in St. Louis, a master’s degree in business administration from Midland University and is attending Creighton University School of Law.

He supports stabilization of state aid funding, a shutdown of the school-to-prison pipeline, and increased salaries for paraeducators.

Sen. Justin Wayne, District 13

Northeast Omaha and Douglas County.

Sen. Wayne was recommended four years ago and has gained NSEA’s support again. A past member and president of Omaha’s Board of Education, he is a Creighton University School of Law grad and is CEO of Trailblazers Constructors LLC. He is past president of the Mid-west Trailblazers Youth Program.

This year, Wayne offered a bill on NSEA’s behalf to require school districts to devise individualized response plans following the report of certain violent incidents involving students (LB1217). The bill requires administrators and staff to develop an individual response plan in an effort to mitigate future incidents.

Sen. Lynne Walz, District 15

Dodge County, including Fremont.

Walz is a former Fremont teacher and seeks a second term. She received high marks from an NSEA interview team four years ago, and her continued support earned another nod. The team said Walz is “enthusiastic, open-minded” and “stupendous” in support of public education. She is a key member of the Education Committee.

Walz has raised awareness of the need for more mental health services in schools. She offered and passed a bill to improve protections and quality of life for people with disabilities. She earned the 2017 Legislator of the Year Award from the Fraternal Order of Police for work to protect first responders in the line of duty.

Walz this year offered LB251, to create the Child Hunger and Workforce Readiness Act; LB725, to reimburse school districts and Educational Service Units for mental health expenditures; and LB727 to designate a “point person” in each school district with respect to mental health services. She has pledged to seek property tax relief.

Sheryl Lindau, District 17

Wayne, Thurston and Dakota counties.

Lindau is seen as “highly motivated to support education employees and public education” and is passionate about education issues. She is familiar with the political process and is able to step



**Helen Raikes****Sen. Anna Wishart****Eliot Bostar****Tim Royers****Sen. Dan Quick**

into office ready to go.

She served on the Wayne city council and as mayor for 10 years, and served eight years on the Nebraska State College Board of Trustees. She is past president of the Nebraska League of Municipalities.

She would seek a reliable funding stream to replace property taxes, believes well-educated workers contribute to the good of the state, and favors stability in state funding of public education.

Sen. Mike Flood, District 19

Madison County and northeast Stanton County.

Former Sen. Flood served two terms in the Legislature starting in 2004. Last year, he announced he would seek to regain his old seat in the Legislature (term limits prohibit more than two *consecutive* terms).

During his two terms in the Legislature, he served six years as Speaker, and was generally described as a friend to public education and a consensus builder. He has supported formula-directed state aid to education, and believes education is important to the state's future.

Brodey Weber, District 21

Northeast Lancaster County.

The team that interviewed the three candidates for District 21 said Weber's "knowledge and understanding of the issues and policy will serve him well" in his race.

Members were impressed with his passion for public education and his fierce advocacy for educators. He has lived in District 21 his entire life.

Weber serves on the board for Community Action and on the board of his neighborhood association. He said he hopes to champion early childhood education and understands the importance of Head Start and Early Head Start and similar programs.

Helen Raikes, District 23

Saunders, Butler and Colfax counties.

Raikes is a past executive policy fellow for the Society for Research in Child Development. She served with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the mid-1990s and led a 15-university consortium and directed contracts and grants on a multi-million-dollar study to create a field of study on the development of low-income infants and toddlers. She retired from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as an early childhood education professor.

The Raikes family has farmed in Saunders County for more than 100 years. She says legislators must step forward to solve the tax inequity that hampers agriculture. She believes public funding is inadequate and that "Schools are at the heart of communities and productive and skilled graduates create businesses and general vitality

— economic and otherwise."

The members from the Wahoo and East Butler locals who interviewed candidates said Raikes "has a genuine vested interest in the communities that she'll serve and figuring out what their needs are."

Sen. Anna Wishart, District 27

Parts of southeast Lincoln.

Wishart had an excellent understanding of the Legislature long before she was recommended by NSEA for her first term as a senator: she had worked for six years as a legislative staffer, giving her a giant head start in institutional and operational knowledge.

In her four years as a senator, she has proven an ardent and articulate supporter of public schools. She sits on the Appropriations Committee and is vice chair of the State-Tribal Relations Committee. Her commitment to children is exemplified outside the legislature. She is director of partnerships for Beyond School Bells, a coalition with a mission to improve access to quality after-school and summer school programs, especially in rural and under-served communities.

Eliot Bostar, District 29

South central Lincoln.

Bostar is "running to move beyond political rhetoric and solve the problems our state is facing." He earned a business degree from Embry-Riddle University, and with wife Carrie, chose to raise a family in Lincoln. He was hired in 2014 as executive director of Nebraska Conservation Voters and Conservation Nebraska, and tasked with establishing those organizations, which now boast 25 employees.

Bostar is an appointed member of the Lincoln Electric System Board of Directors. On state aid, Bostar said "we need to think about additional revenue sources that don't burden working families."

Tim Royers, District 31

Parts of Omaha and Millard in the Zorinsky Lake area.

That Royers is a dynamic and articulate advocate for public education is unquestioned. He taught for 13 years at Millard West High School, has coached the school's debate team to multiple state titles and was twice the state's Debate Coach of the Year. He was Nebraska's 2016 Teacher of the Year.

He spent a decade on the Millard Education Association's negotiations team, including time as chief negotiator, where he has worked with colleagues and district negotiators to resolve contracts totaling more than \$1 billion.

Royers will focus on increasing state funding so schools are less reliant on property taxes, while ensuring equitable statewide funding. "We are overly-reliant on property taxes and there is no safety valve protecting schools if equalization dollars are reduced in the appropriations process (to) below needed levels," he said.



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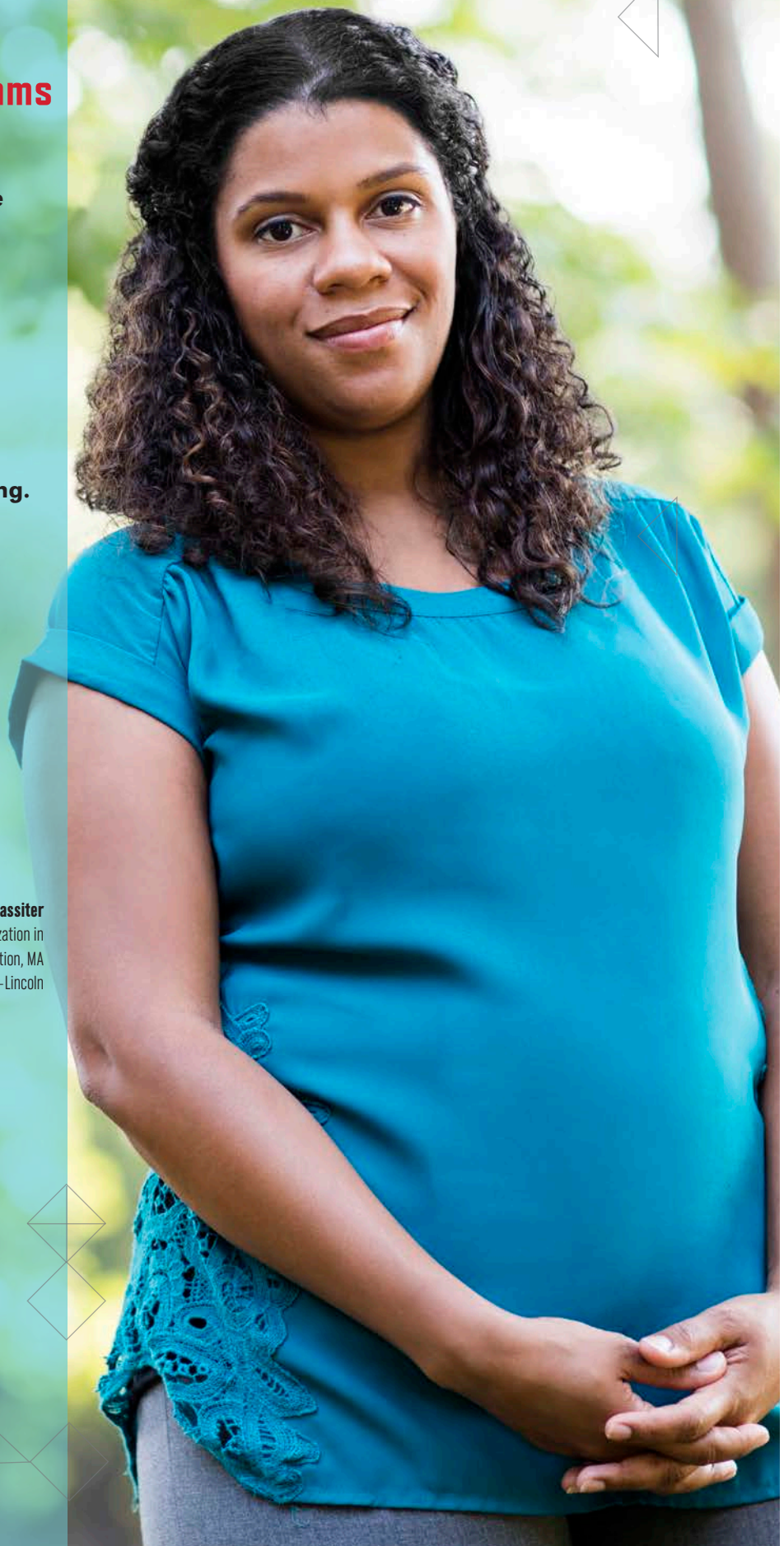
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**Allison Heimes****Sen. Tom Briese****Sen. Tom Brewer****Susan Hester****Jen Day**

Sen. Dan Quick, District 35 *The City of Grand Island.*

Quick received NSEA's support four years ago, with the interview team calling him "genuine, very honest, and down-to-earth."

Quick is a power plant mechanic and has worked as a heavy equipment operator, a farm hand and a grain elevator employee. He is president and business manager of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers No. 1597. He is past president of the Nebraska State Utility Workers and the Central Nebraska Labor Council.

This year, he offered LB1048, to create the offense of sexual assault by a school employee and to provide automatic notification of the crime to the Commissioner of Education. NSEA supported LB1048.

In 2019, he offered and passed a bill to amend existing economic development statutes to include early childhood infrastructure development for cities and villages. NSEA backed passage. He also offered LB226, with \$4 million to hire and train staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers to keep a youth/staff ratio of 8-to-1.

Allison Heimes, District 39 *Douglas County, largely west of 180th St.*

Heimes has the degrees and work experience to do well.

She has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nebraska at Omaha, a master's degree in government organization and leadership and a law degree from Creighton University. An attorney, she specializes in immigration and criminal law.

Heimes and her husband have two sons, with the oldest in preschool at Elkhorn. "His teachers work so hard to provide him with the tools he needs to succeed," she said.

Heimes knows it takes money to run government and supports finding new revenue sources, such as renewable energy. She would seek to increase state funding to public schools, with part of those monies used for mental health professionals in schools. She opposes charter schools and vouchers. Members from Millard, Elkhorn, Logan View and the Douglas County Youth Center interviewed her.

Sen. Tom Briese, District 41 *Garfield, Wheeler, Valley, Greeley, Sherman, Howard, Boone, Antelope and Pierce counties.*

Unopposed in a second run for the Legislature, Briese is a well-respected moderate who has sought property tax relief for ag and residential property owners alike. NSEA recommended him in 2016.

Sen. Tom Brewer, District 43 *Dawes, Sheridan, Cherry, Keya Paha, Brown, Loup, Blaine, Logan, Thomas, McPherson, Hooker, Grant counties and a slice of Box Butte County including Alliance.*

"We believe he will be an advocate for schools in the district."

That was the assessment of Brewer by the team of NSEA members who interviewed the two candidates for Legislative District 43. Team members cited Brewer's legislative experience, his success at getting legislation introduced and passed, and his knowledge of the district as assets. The team said Brewer "looks not only at education but at the entire district, including economic development and keeping high school graduates in the district."

Brewer, a military veteran, chairs the Legislature's Government, Military and Veterans Affairs Committee, and serves on the Education Committee because, he wrote in his NSEA questionnaire, "I have a sincere desire to ensure a good education is one of the important functions local and state government provides to Nebraskans."

Susan Hester, District 45 *Eastern Sarpy County, most of Bellevue.*

Hester is a retired teacher seeking to replace term-limited Sen. Sue Crawford and is a worthy replacement. She taught at-risk students and night school at Bellevue West High School. She served as the district's high-ability learner facilitator for the last nine years of her career. Today, she is the Nebraska director of Science Olympiad, is on the board of the Bellevue Public Schools Foundation, and on the board of the eastern Nebraska Community Action Partnership.

She said the legislature must re-evaluate and rebalance the tax system to provide certainty to school districts and property tax relief.

The NSEA team said Hester "believes teachers deserve due process. She strongly opposes charter and private schools and vouchers. Hester understands the shortfalls of school finance and state aid. She supports eliminating the budget lid." Members from Omaha, Bellevue and Peru State College interviewed the candidate.

Jen Day, District 49 *Northeast Sarpy County, Gretna and LaVista.*

Day is "very pro-public education, pro-teacher, against state funding for charter schools and against vouchers," said the interview team. She has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Nebraska-Omaha and is co-founder and owner of a strength and fitness business.

"I believe that my experience as a business owner, my formal education in politics and government, along with my passion for public policy, proficiency at diplomacy, and commitment to making educated, informed decisions make me a great candidate for the nonpartisan body of the Nebraska Legislature," Day wrote.

Her primary initiative as a state senator will be to "ensure that all Nebraska students have access to a well-funded, quality public school" and to ward off attempts at allowing vouchers and charter schools in Nebraska. NSEA interview team members were from Louisville, Papillion-LaVista and Omaha.



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**Patsy Koch
Johns**



Lisa Fricke



Patti Gubbels



**Jacquelyn
Morrison**



Jack Stark

Nebraska State Board of Education

Patsy Koch Johns, District 1

City of Lincoln and eastern Lancaster County; large parts of the Crete, Norris, Waverly and Palmyra school districts.

Koch Johns spent a career teaching at Cozad and then Lincoln High School, where she chaired the English and theatre departments. Koch Johns was Nebraska's 2006 Teacher of the Year.

She has a passion for developing equitable policies and programs and chairs the state board's Student Equity and Access Committee, which developed the board's Equity Statement and Equity Lens.

Lisa Fricke, District 2

Sarpy County, and a section of south central Douglas County mainly in the Millard school district.

Fricke is a retired teacher and tireless advocate for students and public education. She is well-versed in the needs of public schools and the students who attend those schools.

She has helped develop state assessments for reading, writing, and math. She was a gubernatorial appointee to the Special Education Accountability Commission, and a mentor for the Teammates Program. She has also served on School Improvement Visitation Teams.

Patti Gubbels, District 3

Knox, Cedar, Dixon, Dakota, Pierce, Wayne, Thurston, Burt, Cuming, Stanton, Madison, Platte, Colfax Dodge and Washington counties.

Gubbels spent 30 years as an educator, including teaching professional education courses and placing and supervising education students in field experiences. She led education departments at Dana College and at the competency-based Western Governors University.

Gubbels was the clear choice of the NSEA interview team, which cited her experience and common-sense approach as benefits.

Jacquelyn Morrison, District 4

Southeast Douglas County, south of I-680 and east of 60th St. and northeast Sarpy County, including much of Bellevue.

This attorney and advocate says first and foremost, she seeks election for her two young daughters "and through them I have a vested interest in making sure that we keep Nebraska schools strong."

She said dedicated public school teachers made sure she received a good education and became the first in her family to attend and graduate college. "I believe in public schools and in our teachers."

University of Nebraska Board of Regents

Dr. Jack Stark, Regents District 2

All of Sarpy County except a slice north of Cornhusker Road and east of Nebraska Highway 85.

Endorsed by retiring Regent Howard Hawks, Stark is seen as

ready to work with and for teachers and students.

He was an NSEA member in Lincoln, and later a school psychologist and associate professor at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and Creighton, teaching graduate, dental and medical students. He is past president of the American Association on Intellectual Disabilities.



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Fund for Teachers a ‘Wonderful Opportunity’

Seven years after a trip to Eastern Europe to study the Holocaust, 2020 Nebraska Teacher of the Year Megan Helberg remains convinced that the trip continues to transform her teaching life and personal life.

Helberg’s tour came courtesy of a \$10,000 fellowship from Fund for Teachers, a non-profit that supports educators’ efforts to develop skills, knowledge and confidence that affect student achievement. Since 2001, Fund for Teachers has invested \$33.5 million in 9,000 teachers, transforming grants into growth for teachers and their students.

“This trip to Europe was my first big dive into Holocaust education and since then I’ve never looked back. More doors have opened since this trip, but this is where it all started,” she said.

Helberg said such a trip might attract teachers looking for a way to enhance or “rekindle their flame for teaching.”

The 2013 trip took Helberg to Poland, Germany and the Czech Republic for a deeper look at the Holocaust and Jewish culture. The



Helberg

purpose: to broaden her students’ horizons and expose them to different ways of life by experiencing, with their own eyes, the locations that appear in the books her students read and learn about.

“Seeing a standing cell, gallows and gas chambers at Auschwitz and knowing our students would be reading about these exact objects and locations were moments that made a deep and meaningful change in me as a teacher,” said Helberg. “I can now give first-hand accounts of the feelings and emotions I had at these sites.”

Such is the work of Fund for Teachers, and Helberg wants Nebraska teachers to know that other Nebraska teachers have been successful grant applicants.

“Fund for Teachers is an absolutely wonderful opportunity for Nebraska teachers,” said Helberg.

The 2021 application process will open on Thursday, Nov. 1, 2020. For details, go to:

fundforteachers.org

Buy a Brick, Honor a Favorite Teacher

Lincoln’s Cascade Fountain Celebrates Educators

The Lincoln Parks Foundation has rolled out a new program to recognize Nebraska educators as part of its \$1.6 million campaign to restore Cascade Fountain. The Cascade Honor Roll program provides an affordable opportunity to purchase an inscribed brick for a favorite teacher to be placed at the new plaza area at Cascade Fountain, located at 27th and Capitol Parkway in Lincoln.

“Everyone has at least one favorite teacher. This is a rare opportunity to provide a public tribute to a special someone who made a difference in your life,” said Lincoln Parks Foundation Executive Director Maggie Stuckey.

For a donation of \$250, anyone can pay tribute to a favorite educator with three lines of text (first name, last name, school name) to be displayed permanently on a 4” x 8” standard-size brick at the fountain. Those who order an inscribed brick will receive a letter that can be presented to the honoree, plus an opportunity to purchase a replica brick of the same size for \$50. A dedication will be held when construction is complete, which is expected by late 2021.

Known as “Teachers Fountain,” Cascade Fountain was built in 1978 to commemorate the nation’s Bicentennial and to honor Nebraska educators for their dedication and commitment to provide excellence in education.

Over the years, the condition of the fountain has deteriorated. In January, Lincoln Parks Foundation announced the campaign to restore the fountain. The campaign will provide for rehabilitation and refurbishment and for related site improvements, as well as for an endowment for ongoing repair and maintenance.

Orders must be received by Dec. 31, 2020. For more details, reach the Lincoln Parks Foundation at 402-441-8258 or director@lincolnparks.org, or visit:

lincolnparks.org/cascade

Appleseed: Nutrition Grants Available to Nebraska Schools

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to push school nutrition programs to their limits, No Kid Hungry and Nebraska Appleseed have announced a funding opportunity to support providing food and nutrition to Nebraska families and children. The grant is open on a rolling basis and offers grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000. Funds are intended to support programs adapting to changing needs resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic including: meal service supplies and equipment; costs of hiring additional staff positions or increasing hours for existing staff; transportation costs associated with meal delivery; new costs associated with COVID-19 preparedness like no-touch point of service machines, hand washing stations, PPE equipment and cleaning supplies; and additional expenses as needed.

Funds will be prioritized for locations experiencing economic hardship because of COVID-19, areas with large immigrant or rural communities, or communities of color, and programs that can sustain their community work into the future.

For program-related questions, please contact Eric Savaiano, Economic Justice program manager, Nebraska Appleseed by emailing:

esavaiano@neappleseed.org

Homestead Delivers Monumental History

It’s a sure bet that Nebraskans of 150 years ago never envisioned “virtual field trips.”

So it’s an advancement, to say the least, that in today’s pandemic-driven setting park rangers at the Homestead National Monument near Beatrice are able to deliver Homestead to your students through the magic of distance learning connections/virtual field trips.

Homestead has been a National Park Service leader in virtual connections with a park ranger and offers several highly interactive, virtual programs. These offerings cover a wide range of topics tied to the Homestead Act of 1862:

■ The Homestead Act of 1862:

Students and a ranger explore the history of the Homestead Act of 1862, examine requirements for making a claim and receiving a land patent, and think critically about far-reaching effects of the act.

■ A Day in the Life of a Homesteader:

Students will learn what it took to file a land claim and how people survived to make a life and receive their land patent.

■ **A School Day in 1872:** Homesteaders placed high value on education and would often build one-room schoolhouses before their permanent homes. Students will compare education on the frontier with education today.

■ **Follow the Buffalo:** Students will discover the ways of Great Plains peoples by examining real parts of the buffalo and by determining how they were traditionally used and how those ways were affected by westward expansion.

■ **Women Who Paved the Way:** The Homestead Era and Women’s Suffrage movement were intertwined. Students explore how female homesteaders and suffragists broke down gender barriers and paved the way for modern women.

All distance learning/virtual field trips are free and have been adapted across all grade levels. They typically run 30-45 minutes but can be adjusted. For more details, call 402-223-3514, or email to:

home_education@nps.gov

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Quick Answers are for Simple Problems



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“

*If we do not
invite ALL
stakeholders
to the decision-
making table,
especially those
who are
expected to
implement
the resultant
decisions, we are
not making
the BEST
decisions possible
for our kids.*

”

Today my niece Maria read me a great poem by John Bates, *How Old is This Woods?*

One line really struck me “...quick answers are for simple problems.”

I haven’t had a quick answer for anything since February. Every problem in this year of COVID seems to be a new one that has amazing complexity.

And how people see COVID is from such starkly differing perspectives. As we’ve surveyed our members over the last few months, we’ve seen everything from seven percent of teachers retiring early and teachers outright quitting to those who think the whole thing is overblown and everything should just immediately return to normal.

I took a call one day from someone who was livid that NSEA was supportive of staff and students wearing masks. On the same day I took a call from someone who was terrified that her district *wasn’t* requiring masks for staff and students.

Sadly, the one recurring theme I see across the state is that new, complex problems are being addressed in our old “top-down” decision making authoritarian style. The voices of educators and support staff – the people who are closest to students – are too often left out of too many important decisions.

The Implementation Gap

Since September 1, we’ve seen two new statewide directed health measures (DHMs) issued that affect our school staff and students – without a SINGLE conversation with educators beforehand. As a result, I’ve even had superintendents and school board members alike call me wondering what is going on!

When decisions are made in a vacuum – without hearing the voices of those who will be expected to implement those decisions – you have an implementation gap. Right now, that gap is not only getting bigger, but it is having a negative effect on the lives of children and educators across our state.

Tonight, I received a message from a fantastic, award-winning educator who had just read the latest DHM, which effectively reduced quarantine restrictions for students. The educator wrote that, “We can’t keep kids six feet [apart] ... And even if we could, that basically says ‘we don’t care if your kid is at-risk to

get a potentially life-altering illness.’ I want to quit, but if I quit my family starves.”

We have teachers who are expected to teach students who are physically in front of them, while also providing simultaneous “synchronous” instruction to students watching from home. If anybody tells you this is working well and without problems THEY ARE NOT TELLING THE TRUTH! Our teachers are either spending hours upon hours preparing two separate sets of instruction or those students are disengaged, or perhaps both.

Rebecca Mieliwocki, the 2012 National Teacher of the Year put it best when she said “...the reason we have teachers simultaneously trying to teach children live and distance learners at home is because no one asked teachers if they thought that would work. Do surgeons conduct office appointments while doing surgeries?”

A friend shared with me a picture of his classroom with seven students (the

class was down 75 percent due to positive COVID tests). A student had just asked “I love scary movies, but I don’t like *being* in a scary movie. I could be next, right?”

What is a teacher supposed to say to that?

That same teacher was preparing to rehearse a lockdown in the event of a mass shooting – during a pandemic!

Old Models, New Problems

No one here today has had to respond to the current complex problems we face, so no one has all the right answers. I don’t believe these decisions are being made maliciously. But there is a choice in how we respond. We can continue to attempt to apply old models to new problems, or we can work collaboratively to discover new solutions.

If we do not invite ALL stakeholders to the decision-making table, especially those who are expected to implement the resultant decisions, we are not making the BEST decisions possible for our kids.

As educators, we are used to solving problems with creativity and collaboration. We have proven that we can teach with or without buildings, but we cannot shape the complex answers for our new problems if we’re only told, not asked.

‘... the reason we have teachers simultaneously trying to teach children live and distance learning at home is because no one asked teachers if they thought that would work. Do surgeons conduct office appointments while doing surgeries?’
— Rebecca Mieliwocki

COVID-19 Guidance

Current COVID-19 Resources, including guidance on the Sept. 1 directed health measure, can be found at:

www.nsea.org/COVID19

Take Part in Medicare Supplement Webinars

Blue Cross Offers Virtual Medicare Supplement Updates this Fall

NSEA-Retired has partnered with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska to bring information about Medicare as well as Educators' Medicare Supplement (previously known as NSEA-Retired BlueSenior Classic) to our members in virtual webinars in November and December. Educators' Medicare Supplement is available to EHA subscribers and/or NSEA-Retired members and their spouses who are age 65 and above, and pays for medical costs that Medicare does not cover (both the deductible and co-pay amounts for services that Medicare covers but which are the responsibility of the subscriber).

The plan also has an excellent dental plan that is available on initial enrollment in Educators' Medicare Supplement. Additional information on Medicare can be found at:

www.medicare.gov

The webinar schedule for the remainder of the year will be:

Monday, Nov. 2: 1-3 pm
 Friday, Nov. 6: 9-11 a.m.
 Monday, Nov. 9: 1-3 p.m.
 Friday, Nov. 13: 9-11 a.m.
 Monday, Nov. 16: 1-3 p.m.
 Friday, Nov. 20: 9-11 a.m.
 Monday, Nov. 30: 1-3 p.m.
 Friday, Dec. 4: 9-11 a.m.
 Monday, Dec. 7: 1-3 p.m.
 Friday, Dec. 11: 9-11 a.m.

There is no cost to register, but registration is required. To register, select the "Fall 2020 Educators' Medicare Supplement Webinars" at this website:

www.nsea.org/retired

Members will need a valid email address to complete registration. A confirmation email will be sent to that email address, which will include links to the webinar as well as details on the session. BCBSNE will send educational materials to those who register in advance. You may register for the seminars and also view the recorded presentation following the sessions at:

www.ehapan.org/retiree-info

Connect with Local NSEA-Retired Associations

There are seven local NSEA-Retired Associations, including a few that meet



Ready to Go: On behalf of Omaha Education Association members, this trio attended the Sept. 18 interim hearing on LB31 by the Nebraska Legislature's Retirement Committee. LB31 authorized a study of issues that might arise with moving management of the OEA retirement plan to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems, which handles retirement for all other Nebraska public school employees. From left are Roger Rea, Walta Sue Dodd and NSEA Vice President and OEA President Robert Miller. Rea is vice president of the Omaha School Employees Retirement System. Dodd is president of OEA-Retired.

with the local Nebraska Retired School Personnel groups. These local associations are located in the Lincoln, Omaha, Millard, Bellevue, Grand Island/Hastings, Scottsbluff and Elkhorn and Sandhills district areas.

Note that the Lincoln organization is offering a \$50 rebate on their \$100 retired lifetime and pre-retired lifetime local membership this fall.

If you would like to connect with one of these groups, contact NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at:

dtonack@neb.rr.com

If you are not in one of these areas, how about creating a group? It only takes 10 members and completion of a form from the NSEA office! These groups offer great ways to socialize, stay involved with the education profession and step up to our CORE (Call on Retired Educators) opportunities.

Still Time to Register for Fall Conference

We hope to "see you" at our Friday, Oct. 16, Fall Conference. If you have not yet registered, go to nsea.org/retired and select 'Calendar and Events'.

You may begin to log in the Zoom site on October 16 as early as 9:30 a.m.

Featured speakers are Nebraska astronaut Clayton Anderson, International United Nations official Dr. Natalie Hahn, and SHIIP representative Alicia Jones.

Anderson spent 167 days in space and 38 hours and 28 minutes executing six space walks.

Attendees will have a chance to visit and share stories in small groups of participants in what are called "breakout rooms." The morning will conclude with Alicia Jones, director of the state's Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIIP), which educates people about Medicare, assisting seniors and those with disabilities, allowing them to make informed decisions on topics related to health insurance.

There will be a brief opportunity for questions and answers. Prizes will be awarded at the end of the conference, at approximately 11:30 a.m.

Questions? Contact NSEA's Rebecca Smith at 1-800-742-0047 or at:

rebecca.smith@nsea.org

You may also contact NSEA-Retired President De Tonack at 402-525-4264, or at:

dtonack@neb.rr.com

— De Tonack,
 NSEA-Retired President

NSEA Helps To Ease Certification Logjam

Launch of NDE Portal Creates Backlog; NSEA Answers Call

Sometimes, a confluence of events can cause all kinds of stress.

Just ask **Ralston Education Association** member **Courtney Walstrom** and **Conestoga Education Association** member **Stephanie Petersen**.

Earlier this year the Nebraska Department of Education launched a redesigned online certification portal.

Prior to the transition to the new certification website, the NDE notified school district officials across the state that the outdated certification website would be closed down at the first of January and that the new site would not be up and running until February 1. New certification candidates were urged to apply before the January shutdown, if possible.

The new certification portal was up and running on schedule on February 1 but went live with technical issues and bugs to be worked out. The bugs were serious enough that developers were called in to work on-site to resolve issues and get the site working smoothly.

And everyone knows what happened in March: COVID-19 landed hard. Education went remote.

The certification application and renewal requests soon began to pile up. As the backlog grew, NSEA's 18 field staff began hearing concerns of teachers waiting on recertification approval. First-time applicants were also on edge, looking for jobs and not certain whether they would have certification in hand when they received a job offer or by the time they would begin teaching.

At one point, several thousand applications were awaiting approval.

Walstrom and Petersen were among those left in limbo. Walstrom had applied for renewal in April, Petersen in May.

"I had applied for renewal in April," said Walstrom. "On returning to school this year, I still hadn't received it yet."

Petersen echoed that concern. "As the August expiration date was quickly approaching, I was getting really nervous about the renewal," she said.

At that point, NSEA was already on the job. As early as mid-February, **NSEA President Jenni Benson** and **Executive Director Maddie Fennell** were working with the NDE to discuss the problems teachers and school districts were encountering with the bottleneck of applications.

"We encouraged members to let us know of certification issues and continued to forward those to NDE," said Fennell.

'I am very grateful for the support that I was given from the NSEA to resolve my recertification very quickly. I know that they will always be there for support when a situation arises.'

— Stephanie Petersen

Check Your Certificate's Expiration Date

Do you need to check when your teaching certificate is due? The Educator Application and Certification Hub (TEACH) is the Nebraska Department of Education's new certification portal. Applicants must register before being allowed to log in. Here is the registration and log in address:

<https://online.nedoe.org/##>

"Brad Dirksen, administrator in the NDE Office of Accountability, Accreditation and Program Approval worked closely with NSEA to address issues."

Dirksen had reached out to school district administrators with regular updates beginning in February. He also made it clear, early on, that applicants renewing their certification and holding a current certificate set to expire August 31, 2020, were able to begin the school year.

Meanwhile, NSEA field staff who heard certification concerns from members or administrators forwarded them directly to Fennell, who worked closely with Dirksen to monitor and resolve concerns as quickly as possible.

Petersen followed that guidance, reaching out to Fennell for assistance. Ralston Education Association leadership told Walstrom to do the same.

"A week or so after I had contacted them, Brad emailed me directly stating that my certificate was renewed," said Walstrom.

"They worked their magic and I had my certificate renewed within days!," said Petersen.

By mid-August, the certification backlog was cut from thousands to fewer than 500, with the number falling daily.

"Brad was sending emails into the wee hours of the morning to make sure educators were taken care of before the Aug. 31 deadline," said Fennell. "I was tracking members who contacted us, and I worked

with Brad to make sure that all of their certificates were taken care of in time."

Walstrom said "It was a very stressful time at the beginning of the year, but I'm glad that they responded, and it all worked out."

Petersen agreed. "I am very grateful for the support that I was given from the NSEA to resolve my recertification very quickly. I know that they will always be there for support when a situation arises."

Mid-Plains Community College business instructor **Cathy Nutt** has been named Teacher of the Year by the Nebraska State Business Education Association. She has been an NSEA member since she joined the college faculty in 2007.

Aside from teaching duties, she manages internships for college business students and serves as the Center for Teaching Excellence coordinator at Mid-Plains.

Working under recommended safety measures and with many faculty telecommuting, the **Northeast Community College Faculty Association** recently voted to donate funds normally designated for faculty in-service activities and student-focused mid-semester activities directly to a student scholarship.

A gift of \$2,500 was donated to the Northeast Community College Foundation and earmarked for the Student Excellence Scholarship, to which many Northeast faculty members also give.

The 2019-20 leadership team of **President Melissa Lemke-Elznic**, **President-Elect Josh Schlote**, **Secretary Kristi Rastede** and **Treasurer Sara Barritt** felt it would be a great way to show support to students. A virtual fall meeting of the association happened, and association members present voted unanimously to donate the funds to student scholarships.

Nebraska State Board of Education member **Lisa Fricke, Bellevue**, has been selected to serve on a Whole Child Policy Study Group organized by the National Association of State School Boards.

The study group hopes to deepen the content expertise of state board members to lead whole-child policymaking in the wake of COVID-19. This project advances NASBE's focus on developing equitable education systems that provide safe, healthy, supportive learning environments where all students can thrive and achieve academic excellence.

Fricke taught for more than 30 years, retired to her Bellevue hometown and won election to the State Board in 2016. She seeks a second term in November, and has NSEA's recommendation.

Registration Extended on Race, Belonging Series Begins Oct. 24

Registration has been extended to Oct. 9 for the 12-session series entitled *NSEA Conversations About Race and Belonging*. The series is designed to encourage participants to improve their personal racial understanding based on self-examination and awareness.

The program builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation and storytelling, among other methods.

For more details, go to:

www.nsea.org

The program is funded by a grant from the National Education Association.

Speaking of Education

“We will get into good trouble every day, in every state, in every community all across this nation to keep our students and educators safe and center our schools in equity and excellence during the COVID-19 crisis.”

— *Becky Pringle,*
NEA President

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

Missing Assignments

From Brenda Dwyer, a technology applications teacher in Texas:

“I require that my students who have missed assignments complete the current assignment BEFORE they do the make up work. This way they are doing the same work as everyone else in the class. If the student completes the current assignment and has extra time, he can then start on his make up work. If not, they have to come after school or before school to make up work. I have found that this approach minimizes the amount of work that a student does not complete.”



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

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