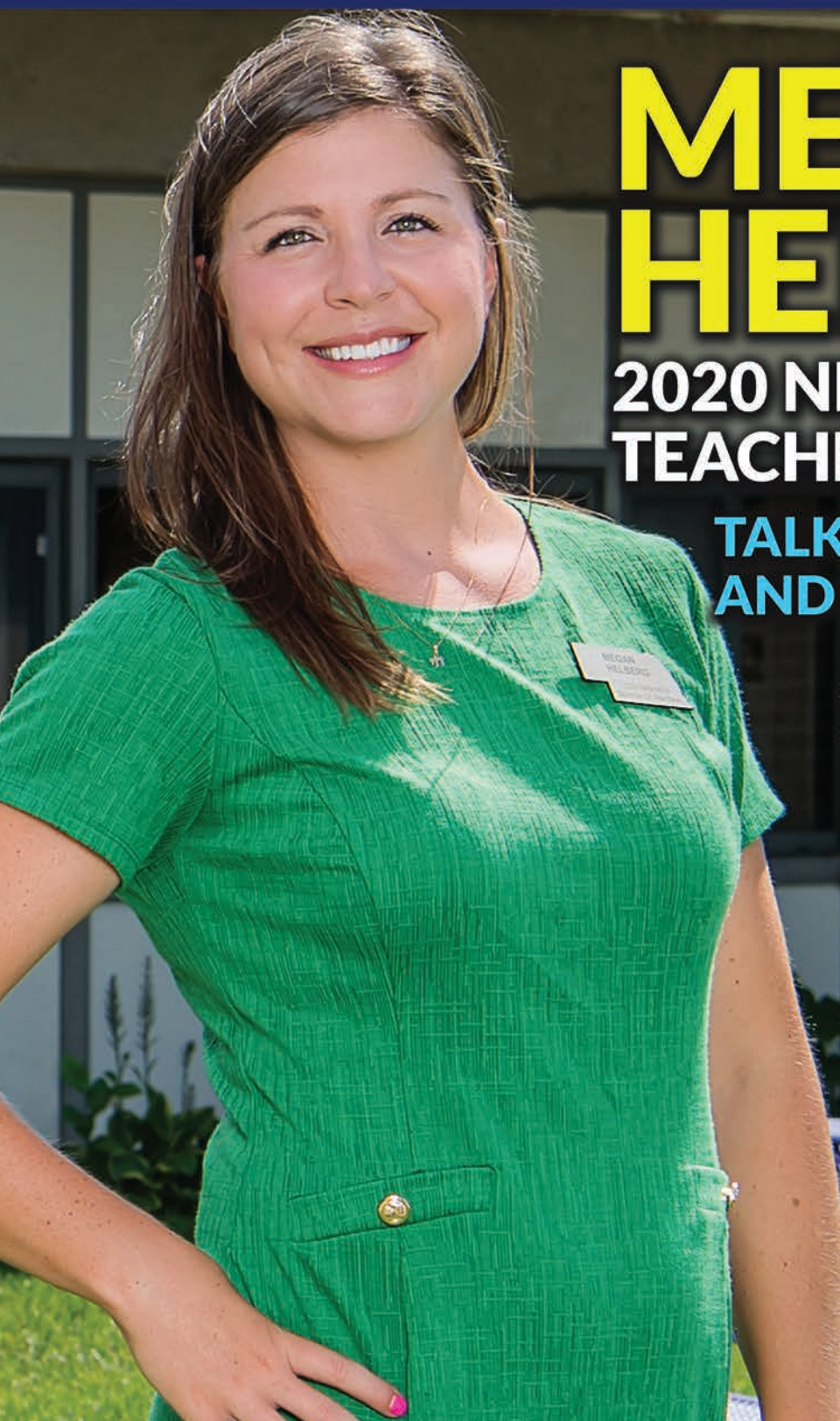


The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association • September 2020



MEGAN HELBERG

2020 NEBRASKA
TEACHER OF THE YEAR

TALKS OF TEACHING,
AND WHY #YOUBELONG

Also:

- GOOD NEWS (MOSTLY) AT THE CAPITOL
- SPEECH & ACTIONS IN ASSESSMENTS
- NSEA EXPANDS WEBINAR OFFERINGS



THE VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
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Save Time by Voting Early!

Considering all the upheaval that has accompanied 2020, there is one thing NSEA members can do to save time and energy while practicing social distancing: vote by mail!

"Voting by mail is so easy and is such a time-saver," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "It's the perfect way for busy educators to cast a ballot."

Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen announced in August that every registered voter in Nebraska will receive an application for mail-in ballots this fall. In order to receive a ballot for the Nov. 3, 2020, General Election, voters must complete the application form they receive in the mail, apply a stamp and drop the form in a U.S. Post Office mail box, or drop it off at their county clerk or election commissioner's office.

Voters may also go to the secretary of state's website, click on the 'Early Voting' tab and follow instructions found there.

Early voting ballots will be mailed out beginning on Monday, Sept. 28. The last day to request a ballot to be mailed is Friday, Oct. 23, and all ballots must be delivered to the county election office on Nov. 3, 2020, by 8 p.m. CDT (7 p.m. MDT).

Those educators who are not registered to vote have until Friday, Oct. 16, to register. Registration can be completed in the county clerk or election commissioner's office, or at the Nebraska Secretary of State's website at:

<https://sos.nebraska.gov>

Questions? Contact your local county clerk or election commissioner's office.

A complete list of NSEA's recommended candidates will appear in the October edition of *The Voice*.

Nebraska Groups Honored at RA, Unicam

Two Nebraska organizations were honored prior to the National Education Association's annual Representative Assembly, and then further honored with congratulatory resolutions by the Nebraska Legislature.

The Empowerment Network received NEA's 2020 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Award.

Inclusive Communities received the NEA's 2020 Rosa Parks Memorial Award.

Both Omaha-based organizations were honored at the NEA's 2020 Human and Civil Rights Awards program, which was held virtually on July 1.

Later in July, Omaha State Sen. Michaela Cavanaugh introduced congratulatory resolutions at the Nebraska Legislature, honoring both organizations for their work. Those resolutions were approved.

Founded in 2007, The Empowerment Network is dedicated to continuing Dr. King's goals of addressing how issues of poverty, employment, and housing affect the educational process.

The Empowerment Network is focused

on fighting the social and economic gaps that deny young people their right to a quality education. Working in concert with the North Omaha community and neighboring areas, Empowerment Network has put into motion strategies that bring people together in monthly youth summits under one umbrella to learn and grow from each other, and find pathways for success.

Inclusive Communities was founded in the 1930s when Omaha civic leaders from different faiths refused to be bystanders in the face of hatred, intolerance, bigotry, fear and deeply embedded prejudice.

Inclusive Communities works to help diversify the public school system, from educators to administrators, by training them in ways to dispel stereotypical myths within the student body, and helping to provide role modeling that inspires young people, already in a questioning time of life with issues of identity, to learn respect for all cultures.

To learn more about both groups, go to:
<https://www.neahcraawards.org/>

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

Would you like to write an item for *The Voice*? Would you like to write an opinion column or an article on what is working in your classroom? Submissions can be classroom-related, humorous, inspiring or otherwise teaching related.

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

thevoice@nsea.org

On the Cover: Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year Megan Helberg has great reasons for membership in NSEA. Learn more on Page 11. (Photo by KC Creations Photography, Burwell, NE)

Welcome to Your First Year



**NSEA President
Jenni Benson**

“

I am proud
of our NSEA
leaders,
management
and staff who
are working
together to
ensure every fi-
ber of our
Association
strength
is working
for members
so that members
can continue to
use their voices
for the
betterment of all.
”

Many of you I have met, and I hope to meet all or many of the rest of you soon. If I could meet you all together, in one space or spot, I would have one thing to say: whether you are certified staff, a higher education member, a paraprofessional or are involved in education in some other way, welcome to your first year at school!

I say “first year” with good reason. Navigating the school experience in this pandemic-laden environment is essentially a first-year experience for all of us. It’s like a feeling of déjà vu, taking us back to that first year of teaching, with a very off-kilter start to school opening.

When the coronavirus arrived earlier this year, it did not offer a playbook for medical professionals. It did not provide lesson plans for teachers. Yet medical professionals have toiled heroically in dangerous conditions. Educators at all levels flipped on a dime to implement remote learning and other new and innovative methods of teaching.

In that regard, despite a few bumps along the road, educators have made incredible strides. We are teaching, and kids are learning. It may not be an optimal situation, but if we persevere and follow safety protocols, we will emerge stronger.

‘He Ain’t Heavy...’

As I am sure you do, I feel I am carrying a heavy load. Family and colleagues, school and community, all need our attention and our strength.

I spent some self-care time listening to music over the past summer. One song always reminds me that we are all family and that we must care about others as we toil under the weight of this relentless reminder that life as we know it is undergoing tremendous change.

The song traces back to 1880’s Scotland when a minister asked a little girl whether she needed help caring for and carrying her polio-stricken baby brother. The story survived in various forms and surfaced off and on through the years. It eventually became a hit song, with a 1969 version by The Hollies gaining the most exposure. This segment from *He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother* is so moving:

*The road is long
With many a winding turn*

*That leads us to who knows where
Who knows where
But I’m strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother.*

Rooted in service and equity, our advocacy for members is a hard pull, a heavy load. However, that advocacy is made easier and we are made stronger by working for the benefit of all students and all educators. The knowledge that I stand atop the shoulders of so many great teachers is an honor as I start my second term as president of NSEA. I am completely dedicated to the service of our Association’s commitment to great public schools for ALL children.

A Sharp Focus

I began my second term in early August with a 1,300-mile, eight-stop trip across the state. I found amazing educators at every turn, each genuinely working together for the betterment of their students and their school. They were using their strong voices and actions to make sure their school

district’s learning environment was safe.

Every member and local association have unique circumstances and needs. I am proud of our NSEA leaders, management and staff who are working together to ensure every fiber of our Association strength is working for members so that members can continue to use their voices for the betterment of all.

At NSEA, our advocacy has been sharply focused for much of the spring and summer on a message of “safe return to learn.” I have completed dozens of media interviews, ending most with the clear message that “safety is the Number 1 priority when looking at reopening schools.”

Professor David Brett-Major, in the Department of Epidemiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Public Health concurred with our stance, and said: “I agree with the teacher’s union. That is, if you’re going to take steps to open schools, it should be done in concert with a strategy that’s looking to decrease overall risk.”

Our educators are strong and dedicated. With members like that, our work is made easier, our actions are recognized. As we traverse this new “first year” we cannot ask for more.

Be safe, and have a great year!



Social Media Visibility: NSEA President Jenni Benson and others used this social media frame to push for safe practices in schools as the new school year began in August.

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On the Zoom: Sixteen NSEA members, NSEA President Jenni Benson and Executive Director Maddie Fennell joined various Nebraska Department of Education staff to talk of education issues.

16 NSEA Members Selected to Advise Ed Commissioner

Will Serve on Committee to Talk of Ed Issues

Sixteen NSEA members have been selected from a field of more than 100 nominees to serve on an advisory committee to Nebraska Commissioner of Education Dr. Matt Blomstedt.

The committee met in early August via Zoom to participate in *A Conversation with the Commissioner: Education in the Pandemic*. In a letter to the committee members, State Board Relations and Rules and Regulations Officer Dr. Ryan Foor said it is important to hear the teacher voice.

“Your engagement and input...is critical for the NDE staff to hear teacher voices, specifically your voice, as we continue to work with school and state leaders in providing guidance for the K-12 education system,” wrote Foor.

The initial meeting sought input on safe workplace accommodations and individual classroom plans.

NSEA President Jenni Benson was pleased that Blomstedt and NDE were so

willing to hear from teachers.

“We have a great working relationship with the commissioner and with NDE staff. We appreciate that teacher voices are being considered on pandemic-related and other issues that affect students and teachers,” she said.

“We believe this committee will go a long way towards keeping the commissioner and the NDE staff informed of the successes and challenges our members face each and every day,” said Benson.

Members of the committee are:

Arlington: Jason Wiese
Beatrice: Mark McClanahan
Bellevue: Tanishia Jacobs
Chadron: Renae Noble
Douglas Co. West: Rosita Krauel
Elkhorn: Suzy Renken
Grand Island: Michelle Carter
Lincoln: Megan Riggert
Millard: Jeffrey Sjuts
Norfolk: Kimberly Erickson
North Platte: Christina Simants
Norris: Mary Schlieder
Omaha: LaDeidre Jackson, Lee Perez
Springfield-Platteview: Andrew Hopp
Wilber-Clatonia: Jill Shea-Carpenter

Student Affiliate Now ‘Aspiring Educators’

For 64 years, college students working toward a career in education have been members of the Student Education Association of Nebraska (SEAN).

No longer. That name was sidelined this year in favor of Aspiring Educators-NSEA after a New Business Item at the 2019 SEAN Delegate Assembly proposed the name change. That NBI was approved at the 2020 SEAN Delegate Assembly and took affect Aug. 1, with the start of the new Association year.

Aspiring Educators more accurately reflects the group’s mission and reflects cohesiveness with the National Education Association Aspiring Educators organization.

In Defense of Teachers

Bennett: ‘No Apologies for Daring to Do Our Best, Safely’

As school districts opened across the state in August, it was with a spectrum of emotions, ranging from joy to angst.

Emotions often ran warm, as every district took a localized approach to re-opening in the face of the pandemic. An early August meeting of the Lincoln Public Schools Board of Education saw nearly 60 people address the board. Many were educators, genuinely concerned about the district re-opening plan. Some patrons, however, criticized teachers.



Bennett

Lincoln Education Association President Rita Bennett was second to address the board at the beginning of the meeting. She then stayed until nearly midnight and was the final speaker. Here is her note to LEA members the next morning.

With the clock nearing midnight at the school board meeting, I had more I needed to say. I scrawled out some quick thoughts and decided there would be one more public comment. I wanted to have the last word in response to some of the vitriol directed at teachers last night. Here are my remarks:

“A lot of teachers spoke here tonight. A lot of others did, too. Teachers are the least selfish, most selfless people with whom I have the pleasure to work, and I am proud to be one of them.

“The criticism I’ve heard both from public comments and others tonight is exactly what teachers don’t need right now. The fact is they are being placed into a situation that everyone here acknowledges is not a zero-risk environment in the midst of a catastrophic and historic pandemic, all because we love and care for and teach our community’s children.

“This community has a strong tradition of support for Lincoln Public Schools and for those who work within it. It is heartbreaking to hear teachers criticized as evil, exaggerating, or making up stories. All because we dare to want to do our jobs the best we can while we stay safe and healthy, and because we want to make sure our schools aren’t the incubator for keeping our community held hostage to the pandemic that could have been defeated by now had more people in our community, state, and country had as much heart and commitment as our teachers.

“All who clamor for normalcy and the return to school are imagining a school experience that isn’t even possible as we open our doors tomorrow.

“Teachers want nothing more than to be back with their students. To demonize us for long-term lesson planning for procedures that will actually get everything back to normal sooner for our entire community is not something we should have to apologize for. Our hearts remain with our students, families, and our community. Every day. Now. Always.”

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Jerry Mack
Chadron High School Principal



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NSEA Urged Sound Practice as School Opened

NSEA reached out to numerous political bodies, policymakers and even members over the summer asking for mask mandates and urging sound practice in dealing with the pandemic. Here are some excerpts:

July 14 letter to Gov. Ricketts:

"Schools in areas with high levels of Covid-19 community spread should not be compelled to reopen against the judgment of local experts. Our schools need your support in this. How can it be safe for those schools to reopen with lower thresholds of safety than we currently have for restaurants or hair salons?"

"Educators miss and are concerned for their students. We want to be back in school with students, but we are deeply concerned about the health and safety of students, their families, school staff and communities."

July 24 letter to the Omaha City Council:

"On behalf of the educators living and working in Omaha, we are writing in support of a mask mandate for all citizens in our community."

"We urgently ask that you act immediately to require masks be worn by all members of our community to help ensure the health and safety of children, school staff and all our citizens."

July 24 letter to the Douglas Co. Board:

"We are just a few short weeks from the start of the school year and teachers are eager to reconnect with their students. Yet, if we cannot do so with the appropriate health measures in place and enforced, the lives of all students and school staff are at risk."

By Aug. 3, Gov. Pete Ricketts applauded school districts that required masks. And in an interview with Omaha's KETV Channel 7, University of Nebraska Medical Center's Dr. David Britt-Major agreed with NSEA's push for mask requirements:

"I agree with the teacher's union. That is, if you're going to take steps to open schools, it should be done in concert with a strategy that's looking to decrease overall risk," said Britt-Majors.

Overdrive and Overtime

NSEA Leaders, Staff Lead in Pandemic Response

In July, as school-in-the-age-of-pandemic concerns began to swell, NSEA leadership reached out to policymakers, surveyed educators and worked with hundreds of members concerned about whether they should – or even could – return to school safely.

NSEA developed an *Educator Bill of Rights During COVID-19*, and a *Virtual Learning FAQ*, both of which have been copied by other state associations around the country. Those documents, along with other pandemic-related resources, can be found at:

www.nsea.org

NSEA's 18 organizational specialists, stationed across the state, went into overdrive and overtime to soothe educator jitters, and to solve hundreds upon hundreds of return-to-classroom-safely questions that came in person, via telephone, text message and email.

NSEA President Jenni Benson said school opening jitters took new meaning in 2020.

"This year's nervousness had a very serious side," said Benson. Our leadership and our Association staff worked with, and continues to work with many members to answer questions, to solve return-to-school issues and to encourage policy makers to follow protocol set by health professionals."

NSEA's statewide survey of members in late July drew more than 3,000 responses, with fewer than half believing their school would be able to safely re-open for in-person teaching and learning due to the pandemic.

Educators in Douglas and Lancaster counties were even more concerned, with more than two-thirds indicating they believed it would be unlikely to safely re-open.

Statewide, just 48 percent of teachers believed their school could open safely. In Douglas and Lancaster Counties respectively, only 31 and 32 percent thought it would be safe to open.

"This is typically when teachers are excited and looking forward to getting back to their classrooms and their students," said Benson. "This year, teachers – and parents – were apprehensive about whether schools had put in place proper safeguards to transition back to in-person teaching and learning. Educators remain deeply concerned about the safety of their students, families and themselves."

More than 80 percent of all re-

spondents cited concern for personal safety and concern for student safety as the top two reasons they do not feel ready to return to in-person teaching and learning.

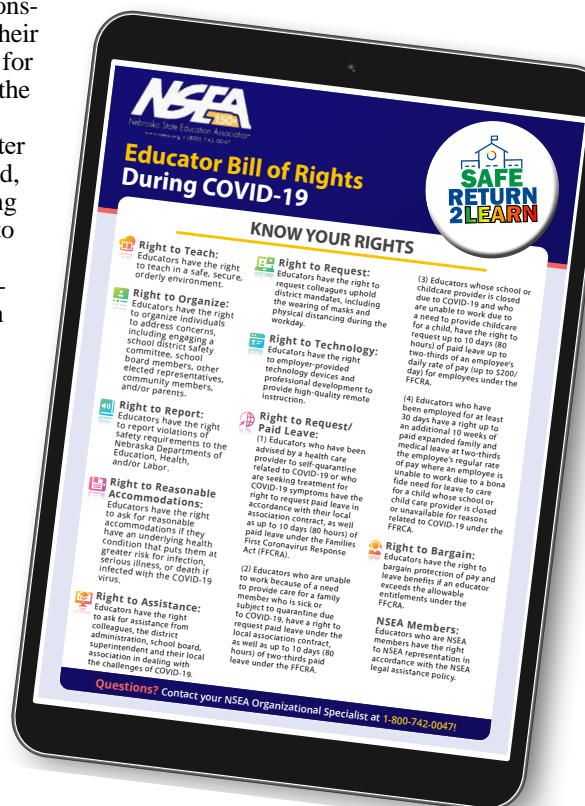
NSEA appealed to schools to implement safety measures outlined in guidance from the Nebraska Department of Education. Daily sanitation of schools, including disinfecting handles, surfaces and bathrooms on a regular basis. Requiring students and staff to regularly wash hands — and having sanitizer and enough cleaning supplies available — are also suggested.

"What we can be sure of is that teachers understand classroom reality," said Benson in a statewide news release. "We know what is and isn't realistic when it comes to social distancing. NSEA has and will continue to be vocal and insistent about the importance of school districts involving teachers in these decisions."

The survey also showed that 32 percent of respondents were more likely to retire or leave the education profession earlier than planned because of the pandemic.

A separate survey of retired educators showed that only 33 percent of those who substituted last year were willing to teach this year. Since retired teachers are a primary source of substitute teachers for schools across the state, that outcome will put even greater stress on schools as teachers exposed to COVID-19 are quarantined.

Questions about pandemic-related education issues? Reach your NSEA organizational specialist at 1-800-742-0047.



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Unicam Session Deemed a Success

Assault Leave Gets Nod, YRTC Bills Approved, Spending Caps Derailed

The 2020 session of the Nebraska Legislature was one for the history books.

Coronavirus forced a four-month break. Tension and acrimony marked the session's final 10 days. A shortsighted property tax relief plan that will ultimately drain funds from state aid to schools — perhaps as early as next session — was given overwhelming approval.

Yet there was much for educators to cheer about as senators adjourned. The passage of LB1186 will allow teachers seven days of injury recovery leave per occurrence when assaulted on the job. The proposal helps address the growing issue of teachers being assaulted while on the job.

"This is an incredibly important, meaningful piece of legislation," said NSEA President Jenni Benson. "It will be of great benefit to those teachers who find themselves in need of recovery time from assault while on the job."

Most school districts now require teachers who are assaulted to use their own already-limited sick leave for recovery from assaults. Under LB1186, the employee will receive injury leave and be paid their usual salary, in full, for such time as they are absent and unable to work as a result of such injury.

Lincoln Sen. Mike Hilgers introduced LB1186 at the request of NSEA. Thurston Sen. Joni Albrecht made it her priority, and without objection it advanced through Final Reading and was signed by the governor. It will go into effect on Nov. 13.

LB147 was less successful and failed to overcome a filibuster. Sen. Mike Groene's bill would have required school districts to maintain a publicly available policy on how and when a student can be removed from and returned to a classroom, including a discipline process that is proactive, instructive and restorative, along with provisions for instructional and/or behavioral interventions for that student. LB147 would also protect school personnel from administrative retribution if an employee used reasonable physical intervention to safely manage the behavior of a student to protect the student, other students, and/or staff from physical injury.

The failure of LB147 also sank LB920 and LB998. The first would have determined how education lottery dollars would be allocated, beginning in 2021, to provide grant funding to future teachers for Praxis subject matter exams and for grant funding to current teachers seeking National Board Certification. LB920



In Discussion: Discussing education issues during a pre-pandemic visit in the State Capitol Rotunda, Omaha Sen. Tony Vargas talks with Omaha Education Association's Cathy Armbeck-Hughes and NSEA Vice President Robert Miller.

also contained the statutory mechanism necessary to fund behavioral awareness and intervention training in LB998. Behavioral awareness training would have been required for administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses and counselors. That language for the training was created by consulting the NSEA, experts from the training community, administrators, school boards, ESU's and other individuals.

Here is a summary of some of the winners and losers.

WINNER: Youth Rehabilitation Treatment Centers

Senators acted to improve learning and address problems at the state's Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers in Geneva and Kearney. The package grew out of the Health and Human Services Committee's six-month investigation into problems at the institutions, especially what led up to an August 2019 crisis at the center for girls at Geneva that ended with female clients at that site being transferred to the Kearney institution for males.

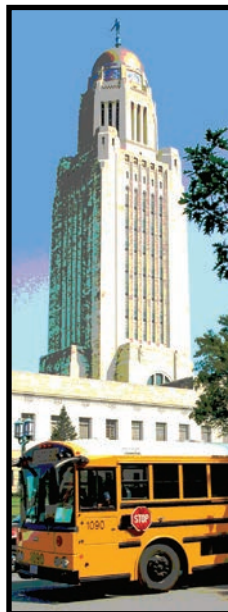
With limited and inadequate space, the number of incidents of aggressive behavior toward students and staff was on the increase, and safety of students and staff had been compromised. NSEA-member educators working within the facility believed the need for separation of male and female students to be both crucial and urgent. The package requires the Kearney site to revert to male-only by next July 1.

NSEA supported the three-bill package and believes they are a step in the right direction to ensure learning conditions for students and working conditions for teachers in the facilities continue to improve.

LB1188 mandates the Office of Juvenile Services establish a superintendent of schools to administer education programs at the YRTCs. LB1140 delays any changes to transferring students from the Geneva facility until March 30, 2021.

WINNER: School Spending Caps Halted

An early version of the property tax reform scheme, LB1106, was halted on first round debate when back-



Nebraska Legislature '20

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ers were unable to overcome a filibuster. An even earlier version, LB974, suffered a similar fate. **NSEA opposed both plans.**

Both plans would have made permanent changes to how public schools are funded, placing a new round of over-restrictive school budget spending lids and limits. The caps would have led to dramatically reduced funding for K-12 schools.

LB1106 provided a two percent budget cap lid. In contrast, LB974 had even harsher spending caps limiting school budget growth to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a figure that could have been as low as zero percent. The CPI is based on the goods a family purchases, not on what it takes to run a school district.

LOSER: Minimal Property Tax Reform Bill Now Threatens Future State Aid

All Nebraska school students lost with the passage of LB1107, the corporate giveaway and property tax scheme, **which NSEA opposed.**

After months of wrangling, in August 2020, senators approved a “compromise” that lumped an oversized corporate tax giveaway, an undersized property tax relief bill, and a long-term program to kickstart a \$2.6 billion program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. According to the Legislature’s Fiscal Office, this scheme would increase the projected budget shortfall to nearly \$905 million in the next biennium – the biennium for which senators must next craft a budget. That shortfall is a clear threat to the funding of state aid to public schools and colleges, as well as to other vital programs.

To make matters worse, senators at the same time failed to decouple the state’s tax provisions from the federal tax rate, a move that will primarily benefit the pocketbooks of Nebraskans who earn \$500,000 or more each year. The move will cost the state \$82 million per year in revenue, putting the effective budget hole at nearly \$1 billion. Over 11 years, the cumulative shortfall is projected at \$4.6 billion.

Renee Fry, executive director of the Open Sky Policy Institute, likened the bill to tax cuts enacted in Kansas in 2012 and 2013. “The wreckage included crumbling roads, school years ending early because of low funds and wait lists for disability services that were several years long.”

Debate on the bill ate hours of time off the clock, tempers flared and heads were butted on LB1107 and other bills, ultimately costing lawmakers time and trust.

“All progress moves at the speed of trust people have for one another,” said Omaha Sen. Sarah Howard.

WINNER: Indigenous Peoples’ Day

LB848 will make Oct. 12 a holiday in Nebraska shared by Columbus Day and Indigenous Peoples’ day. NSEA supported LB848, and **Nebraska NEA Director Tracy Hartman-Bradley testified in favor of the bill.**

WINNER: American Sign Language

LB965 will recognize American Sign Language and provides for teaching of the language in K-12 schools and postsecondary educational institutions. It will also establish a language assessment program for children who are deaf and hard of hearing. **NSEA supported LB965.**

WINNER: Student Safety

LB1080 will require school districts to adopt policies that prohibit sexual conduct with students and former students. The NSEA believes there is no acceptable reason that an educator in a PK-12 school district should be in a sexual relationship with a student, regardless of the age of the student. **NSEA supported LB1080.**

WINNER: Children with Mental Health Needs

Senators approved Sen. Carol Blood’s LB751, which will add a mental health exception to the list of recognized compulsory education requirements. Students who struggle with physical illnesses are allowed accommodations to meet their needs. LB751 will give the same accommodations to those students who are dealing with mental health issues. **NSEA supported the passage of LB751.**

WINNER: Voucher Schemes Blocked

LB1202 was yet another voucher scheme introduced by Elkhorn Sen. Lou Ann Linehan. It would give a state income tax credit to individuals and businesses that contribute money to a “scholarship program” with the intent to pay private school tuition for some students. These dollar-for-dollar tax cuts benefit wealthy corporate and individual donors but shift the burden of funding critical public programs and services to less affluent taxpayers. **NSEA opposed LB1202 and it died in committee.**

Grant Dollars Return Dues to Nebraska

Many of Your NEA Dues Returned in Grants

As the 2020-21 school year opens, NSEA will begin utilizing \$657,000 in grants from the National Education Association.

Another \$91,600 in grant dollars are in hand for 2021-22, and from 2016-17 through 2019-20, NSEA received nearly \$1.1 million in NEA grants for various projects.

“Grant dollars from the National Education Association give a great boost to the work we do,” said NSEA President Jenni Benson.

Here is a look at recent and current grant projects funded by NEA:

■ **Building Successful Pathways and Effective Classroom Supports for Educators:** This grant provides professional development in cultural competence and trauma informed classrooms and also supports work in Educators Rising chapters and students taking the Praxis Core exam for entrance to post-secondary education programs. The three-year, \$439,950 grant runs through 2021-22.

■ **Support for rural early career educators:** This grant supports professional development workshops to support new hires and student members, including in-person and virtual instructional coaching. The three-year grant for \$300,000 ends with the close of the 2020-21 school year.

■ **Recruitment and mentoring of ethnic minority teachers:** This three-year grant for \$444,920 expired in 2018-19, but remaining funds will give the grant at least a five-year life. The grant funded the recruitment of minority students into the profession, including the founding and startup funding for Educators Rising programs at high schools across the state.

■ **Communications:** A \$287,000 grant for 2020-21 will allow NSEA to promote public schools through radio and television advertisements.

■ **Social Justice:** A grant for \$143,400 will support two years of a Challenging Racism program, including the building of a Challenging Racism alumni network. The grant expires in 2020-21.

■ **New Educator Organizing:** Designed to build membership, this three-year grant (2019-22) is for \$224,700.

■ **Education Support Professionals:** A 2019-20 grant to build ESP membership was valued at \$1,500.

Helberg Finds Joy in Teaching

Teacher of the Year Megan Helberg Talks of Love of Learning, Students, Pandemic, and Membership

Megan Helberg did not plan to be a teacher.

"I wanted to be anything but a teacher. My mom was a teacher and she was a good one, a highly decorated teacher. I wanted to forge my own path and do my own thing."

With a business administration degree from Chadron State College in hand, she was pursuing a career in pharmacy. She was taking heavy math and science classes, working at a pharmacy.

"One day I realized 'I respect this, but it's not bringing me joy.' That's when I admitted to myself that I actually did want to be a teacher."

She applied to the Transition to Teach program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, a program she supports vigorously. This fall begins her 11th year teaching English for eighth, 11th and 12th grades in Burwell. She is the 2020 Nebraska Teacher of the Year; is beginning her second year as an NSEA member; and as is her "all-in" style, serves on NSEA's Sandhills District Board of Directors. She spoke to The Voice in late July.

■ What do you love about your job?

I love that I feel like I am not just part of the school, but part of the community. I believe teachers, wherever you are, (should) jump in 100 percent, be a part of that school, be a part of that community. I love that I get to know my students on a personal level and that we see each other outside of school and it's not weird and awkward.

I also love learning every day. That sounds cliché, but it's true. I tell my students "wouldn't it be the worst thing in the world to be a know-it-all?" I love the fact and idea that there's so much out there to learn and that really gets me jazzed up and excited.

■ What is the easiest part of your job?

Getting to know my students. I love getting to know them, creating relationships and bonds in the classroom, developing that sense of trust and respect where we can have open and honest discussions. I feel like if I'm just being real and being myself, then it's easier for them to do that as well.

■ What is it about your job that keeps you up at night?

I would be lying if I said I wasn't a little worried about the coming school year.

My dad had a heart transplant and is immuno-suppressed. We live very close to each other on the family ranch. We work together every day. We see each other every day. We're in each other's homes every day. So lately that has been on the forefront of my mind. It's a fine balance of "I'm really eager to get back to work and be with my students, but I also love my dad dearly and want to do things that are safe and keeping in mind that this pandemic will end."



Ready to Go: Nebraska 2020 Teacher of the Year Megan Helberg Association work. (Photo by KC Creations Photography, Burwell)

Pre-pandemic, things that kept me up at night were trying to think of ways I can reach students that maybe I felt like I could connect with deeper, that maybe were struggling, not necessarily with schoolwork, but just struggling in general, just in life and knowing that I can't swoop in and be their savior, but that I can do what I can and be there for them and listen to them. I think about those students a lot.

■ Why did you apply to become Teacher of the Year?

I was incredibly against it for a while, very reluctant. But I had three people who had nominated me and kept saying "Hey, this is you. You need to apply."

I'd say, "Oh, that's sweet of you. Thank you," but I would never do it. Finally, last year, some friends had an intervention and said, "Please just apply and let's see where it goes."

It's quite a bit of work, but that made me a better teacher because I really paused and reflected on some of my teaching practices. I think it's good for every teacher to pose those questions to themselves because sometimes we sell ourselves a little bit short and then you realize, "Whoa, that was a pretty cool thing that I was able to do." Or, "you know, I'm a little weak in this area. Maybe I do need to beef it up here a little bit more."

The process was a great tool to help me become a better teacher.

■ Your Teacher of the Year tenure has been



Helbrog joined NSEA a year ago and is already deeply involved in (NE)

curtailed by the pandemic. Would you like a do-over?

You've just been told of all these wonderful, amazing opportunities and adventures laid out before you, and then poof, poof, poof – they all just disappeared.

I was looking forward to it as a growth experience, honing some of my skills and public speaking and just expanding my network. You never know who you're going to meet and where that can lead. I also really wanted a chance to brag about Nebraska education and the good things that are going on in our state, to really lift and support teachers across our state.

I had to throw a little pity party for myself for a couple of days, and then just shift my thinking and realize I still have had some wonderful opportunities and experiences that have come out of it, they're just a little different than I had planned.

You were not an NSEA member when you were installed as Teacher of the Year. Why?

To be very honest, one flat-out reason was the cost. When you are first starting in the teaching world, you're fairly young, you don't have a ton of income or savings, and you look at that membership and it seems like a really enormous amount of money.

Then, over the years, I thought that NSEA was for teachers who do something bad or are in trouble and need help. I have been pleasantly surprised to learn that it is so much more, that there are so many more

benefits to being involved with the NSEA that have completely blown me out of the water.

For example?

I can reach out with a mundane question or a serious question and NSEA leadership gets back to me right away, usually with a phone call rather than through social media, which I really appreciate.

They understand and get to know my situation and circumstances. They're there to lend suggestions and advice, knowing that they are not an end-all-be-all, that they can't magically fix everything. I really appreciate the support, advice and suggestions they give on a daily basis.

NSEA has also welcomed me, which I was a little nervous about at first because I had not been a member. But they were there for me with open arms and I jumped right in. They were great about giving me some roles, so I felt I had a purpose, that I was helping the community of teachers across our state.

How valuable is the work of NSEA's 18 organizational specialists?

The organizational specialists are truly the boots on the ground. They are in the thick of things. They get to know each school district. They get to know the teachers within each district, so you don't just feel like you're one of many. You are one, your voice matters, and they are there to help you amplify your voice.

What are your thoughts about NSEA in terms of member benefits, member rights, salary and benefits, political action?

Something that I've been a little in the dark on and always felt like I needed to do better on was the political side of education. You'd hear about different bills introduced into the legislature, but I never quite knew what they were. I depended on other people to fill me in as needed. NSEA does a great job of laying out in a simple format "Here are some bills that are coming up that should be on every teacher's radar. Here's how we feel about each bill. What are your thoughts?"

I appreciate the knowledge that I've gained about what's going on at the state level. It's also something that I can bring back to let teachers at Burwell know what's going on and how it will affect us at our level.

Are you involved in your local education association?

I am. I didn't get in on the elections this year, but they're like, "Megan, you know what's happening next year!" I think that goes back to my style of "if you're going to do something, do it well." You don't have to know all the answers right away, but if you're going to be a part of it, be a part of it and do it well, do what you can to help others.

You should belong to NSEA because...

Just the amount of support that I received. There are times where I will admit, I feel like I'm the crazy one, that "am I crazy for being worried about going back to school? Am I crazy? Is there something wrong with me?"

They assured me that my concerns are valid. "We are listening, we hear your concerns, and we are here to support you."

Have you reached out on that specific topic?

I have. They emailed me within 10 minutes, both Jenni (President Jenni Benson) and Maddie (Executive Director Maddie Fennell). Mike (NSEA Organizational Specialist Mike Wiesen) called the next day. It was immediate feedback and follow up.

I just think to know that Nebraska has several rural schools and areas, sometimes teachers start to feel like maybe you're a little alone or no one really shares your views or ideas, but the NSEA is there to support you and to listen to your voice and to confirm that your thoughts are valid.

You should belong to NSEA because your voice matters and the NSEA is there to validate your worries, your fears, but also your excitement about education. With NSEA, you are part of a strong community.

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Aligning Speech with Actions in Our Classroom Assessments



**Brandy Rose,
School
Psychologist
at ESU No. 7**

“

*Students with
challenging
behaviors
will remember
forever the
teachers and
staff who were
always there
for them, who
continued to
encourage them
throughout the
difficult times.*

”

**By Brandy Rose, School Psychologist
Educational Service Unit No. 7**

At the return to school each fall, teachers may typically have valid concerns or may be anxious about working with new students.

This fall, however, is far from typical.

Students and teachers have been out of school for an extended period due to the pandemic. None of us have experienced a pandemic and there are many unknowns, which lead to so many more questions and fears than normal. Teachers may feel the need for more encouragement and support than normal as they transition from summer break into the school year routine.

Since schools shut down in March, many students have limited access to electronics. They have “enjoyed” unstructured time and had no set routine, conditions that are a teacher’s worst nightmare. I know from experience that even during a normal year, students have a difficult time transitioning back to school in the fall. They must learn to get back into a routine, to wake up early, to follow directions, and to be able to let go of their electronic devices.

This fall, teachers and staff may experience a higher number of transitional difficulties with students when compared to past years. However, there are several strategies that teachers can put into place on Day One that can help improve the transition back to school. Many of these strategies will help the majority of students; however, there will continue to be a number of students who need more support, more guidance, and more time to demonstrate success in the school setting.

Every student has different needs, wants and desires when it comes to engaging in school activities. Teachers and staff need to be open-minded, flexible, patient and willing to attempt new strategies, if needed.

As educators, we may be unaware of the many stressors, challenges and trauma our students may have endured during the unnaturally long break. One of the most important aspects of engaging students in academic settings is the need for structure, consistency, and predictability, regardless of age and grade. Teachers should start the year by creating safe environments that allow each student to feel secure enough to begin to develop a healthy teacher-student relationship. Students this year may need more reminders than normal, more opportunities to practice, and more time than average to get reacquainted with the school routine.

Patience will be key for teachers to keep in mind while their students adjust. If there are days or moments when the teacher feels overwhelmed or is struggling with their students, it is important for the

teacher to take a step back, to perhaps switch duties with another educator for a few moments, to take a break or go for a quick walk before they make the situation worse. I have worked with several students who displayed challenging behaviors that tried to test me on multiple occasions. Once the students understood and realized that I was not going anywhere, that I was consistent and predictable, and that I would always respond in a way that treated them with dignity and respect, they began to develop trust in my methods and my teaching.

I believe that every student needs to feel safe in order for that trust in a relationship to begin. There is a powerful quote that is taught in the MANDT system that says “People will not trust us with their best, until they know we can handle their worst.”

Margaret Shafer wrote an article, Five Key Ingredients for a Well-Managed Classroom, in which she stresses the importance of a set routine.

Let students know what you expect at the start of each day, during the class, when transitioning between activities, and during group work and other classroom routines. Not only do elementary students need to know and practice daily routines, but older students will also benefit from routine.

Next, teachers should work to create a connection with each student. When developing rules for their classrooms, teachers should focus on the positive. Explain to students what you would like them to do instead of what you do not want them to do. Teachers should also spend time explaining consequences that may occur depending on what behaviors are exhibited. Take time to model expected versus unexpected behaviors.

Finally, students will quickly start to figure out your teaching style or voice, and that can affect how the teacher-student relationship develops. Students will see how far they can push the teacher, so I cannot stress enough how important it is to be consistent and predictable in engaging with your students. Schafer’s article can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/fivekey>

Another strategy implements a type of check in/check out system, which can be individualized for a single student or can be used for an entire classroom. The check in/check out system allows mentor-based support, improves student accountability, increases structure, provides feedback daily, improves home/school collaboration, and helps improve a student’s organization/motivation and their ability to self-monitor. Coming back from a long break, teachers may want to consider a type of classroom mental health-based check in/check out system. Each student is able to rate (secretively) how they feel they are doing that morning. Teachers would then allow time to

address the students who may be struggling. Learn more here:

<https://bit.ly/pbischeekincheckout>

The following is a small list of calming and coping strategies that can be tried in the classroom. Note that there are many different options available and it is important to not abandon one of the strategies just because it may not have worked once or with one student. Each student is unique and their needs will differ greatly.

Strategies to try include: 5-point scale, empathy, provide a quiet space, options, additional time, proximity control, non-verbal cues, Premack principle, behavior momentum, break cards, social stories, modification of expectations, movement activities, music, stress blanket, tension release activities, visual schedule, relaxation training, deep breathing, stress ball, rock on a ball, get a drink, wall push-ups, count to 10, yoga, journal, draw, and jump on a mini-trampoline. Some of those are explained more fully here:

<https://bit.ly/copestrats>

I do believe that most students want to have success. It may be difficult to see and realize this at times, and sometimes it may feel like the student has given up all hope. But these are the times when the students need us the most.

As school personnel, we need to use those strategies that have been proven to work, we must rely on our coworkers when we need help, and we must realize it is OK to ask for a break when needed. Students with challenging behaviors will remember forever the teachers and staff who were always there for them, who continued to encourage them throughout the difficult times. So, I encourage you, on behalf of those students, to keep adding to your toolbox and never give up!

Brandy Rose has been a School Psychologist at Educational Service Unit 7 in Columbus for the past nine years. She has a passion for working with students who display challenging behaviors. That passion led her back to school to complete requirements to become a Board-Certified Behavior Analyst.

Today, she travels to school districts to help teachers and staff manage their more severe behavioral students. Last year, ESU7 opened the Learning Academy as an alternative placement option for districts to consider sending students who were not making progress in their regular education setting due to challenging behaviors. She says her role is ever-changing and she constantly adapts to new situations and experiences. The one constant is the need to help and support when it comes to managing challenging behaviors.

NEA Eliminates Annual Fee for Loan Forgiveness Plan

Student Debt Reduction Program Fee Waived

For those Association members seeking relief from student debt, the process just got less expensive.

Exclusive to NEA members, the NEA Members Insurance Trust is offering **one year of no-cost access** to the NEA Student Debt Navigator program powered by Savi. The program identifies all of the best loan repayment options available to each member and provides the information needed to select an informed choice.

According to NEA Member Benefits, members who have used the program save an average of \$156 per month and many thousands over a lifetime using Savi. Considering that the average student debt load is more than \$37,000, \$156 a month is meaningful.

For this year only, the NEA Members Insurance Trust is waiving the usual NEA Member Benefits-negotiated cost of \$29.99 for the Savi program. Non-Association members pay \$99 on the open market.

Utilizing the Savi program compares a member's repayment and forgiveness options in a side-by-side format, and allows the member to pick a repayment plan, enroll and get on-going advice, tools and information.

To utilize the plan, members must create a no-cost account on the NEA Member Benefits website at:

www.neamb.com

Go to the Savi registration page at:

neamb.com/Products/NEA-Student-Debt-Navigator

When completing Savi's online registration, it is recommended to have a recent tax return and student loan statement nearby to make registration run as efficiently as possible.

Questions? Call 1-833-615-1376 between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 8 p.m., Monday through Friday.

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Plaques to Palmer: When Dawn Tedmon and Judy Bennett were announced as two of the award recipients at NSEA's 2020 Delegate Assembly, the pandemic-caused virtual event prevented the physical delivery of plaques. NSEA President Jenni Benson fixed that with a personal visit and presentation to the two Palmer Education Association members in August. From left are NSEA Organizational Specialist Jen Dubas; Dawn Tedmon, NSEA's 2020 Rookie of the Year; Judy Bennett, NSEA's 2020 Education Support Professional of the Year; and Benson. Benson is scheduling delivery of plaques to remaining award recipients.

NSEA Offers Conversation on Race, Belonging

Space is Limited,
Registration Opens Soon

Building on two years of sessions with member educators and administrators, your Association leadership is excited to offer a series of seminars this fall titled *NSEA Conversations About Race and Belonging*.

The 12-session series begins in October via Zoom and will carry through March or April, with a break over the winter holiday.

Using the conversations, participants will:

- Improve their personal racial understanding based on self-examination and awareness;
- Increase their capacity and confidence to initiate and engage in meaningful conversations about race in their classrooms, schools and communities;
- Develop their capacity to be effective allies and empathic partners; and
- Become better equipped to work collectively to dismantle and disrupt racist systems.

The series is an intensive virtual program that builds a peer cohort and peer-to-peer relationships through conversation, storytelling, self-awareness, racial literacy, critical thinking, and the practice of dialogic and reflective skills that will prepare participants to lead small group discussions.

The program covers a range of topics, such as race as a social construct, systemic racism, racial identity, implicit bias, micro-aggressions and other manifestations of the racial contract, inter- and intra-racial allyship, the importance of presence and listening, and how to move from thinking and feeling to transformation and action.

NSEA Conversations About Race & Belonging will be led by Michele Chang and Palma Strand, both of whom have experience working with Nebraska educators. Chang and Strand have led two previous cohorts of NSEA members through a similar program.

The program will accept 22 applicants and consist of 12 sessions of 2.5 hours each.

Watch the NSEA website for registration details and registration beginning in mid-September. That site is at:

www.nsea.org

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

Consider the Security Offered by NEA's Income Protection Plan

Uncertain times often require extra measures.

That's why members might consider the NEA Income Protection Insurance Plan, which provides monthly income to members who are too sick or injured to work, including during pregnancy when there is doctor-ordered bed rest or medical leave.

This insurance can help members avoid having to dip into retirement savings or take out a home equity loan in order to cover necessities while on the mend.

The program offers coverage to fit your budget, direct payments and customization. You can choose your monthly benefit amount, up to two-thirds of your regular salary.

The NEA Income Protection Program is offered through American Fidelity. It is typically sold through individual policies but group plans are also available.

For more details, go to:

neamb.com/products/nea-income-protection-plan

MADD Program to Curb Underage Drinking Available to Nebraska Schools

As schools navigate a new year with new challenges, some things remain unchanged. The temptation for teens to drink is one of them.

MADD's Power of Parents program encourages parents to talk to their teens about alcohol and other drugs.

Research shows 74 percent of teens say their parents are the biggest influence on their decisions related to drinking. When students understand the dangers of underage drinking and use of other drugs, they are more motivated to engage in health-promoting behaviors.

The Power of Parents program is a 30-minute presentation to work into busy schedules while giving parents essential tools for starting the conversation. Power of Parents handbooks for both middle and high school are downloadable at:

madd.org/powerofparents

MADD's Power of Youth program was created to empower teens to wait until 21 to use alcohol and to say no to drug use. By focusing on science, facts and information, MADD works to give teens the tools to make positive choices instead of using scare tactics. This program can be presented in both a 15- and 30-minute format to work into the busy schedules of online or in-person learning and interaction. A downloadable handbook for students is also available at:

powerofyouth.com

Both the programs are available for virtual presentations or as in-person presentation with safety measures in place. For more details, call MADD Nebraska at (402) 434-5330.



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NSEA Staffing Rearranged by Retirements

Three retirements and a departure have caused a staff shuffle in the NSEA family.

Longtime Organizational Specialists Carol Hicks and Marlene Wehrbein ended their NSEA careers by retiring on Aug. 31. Receptionist Sue Barrett retired in mid-August and Becky Fisher left in May.

Hicks served northeast Nebraska for three years in the mid-1990s before returning to teach in her home state of Texas. She began an encore with NSEA in 2011, serving northwest Nebraska members, Omaha Education Association members, and, more recently, members in northeast Nebraska.

Wehrbein was teaching at Louisville when she joined NSEA in January 2000. She worked with teachers in northeast Nebraska, then southeast Nebraska and for the past seven years has worked with Omaha Education Association members.

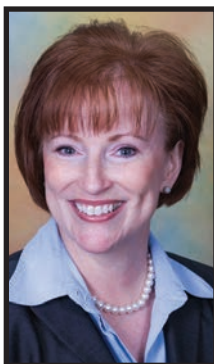
Those departures resulted in a rearrangement of staff assignments and two new hires. Veteran NSEA Organizational Specialist Dr. Cindy Copich has been assigned to Hicks' northeast Nebraska unit. Copich worked in southwest Nebraska and more recently was assigned as the Association's Teaching and Learning specialist while assisting locals in Lancaster County.

Organizational Specialist Isau Metes has been assigned to the Teaching and Learning role, and will also assist with member rights issues, working with Director of Advocacy Trish Guinan.

Becca Dingwell and Kim Story are new to NSEA staff. Dingwell will work with elementary educators in the Omaha Education Association. Story will take the reins of the southwest Nebraska organizational specialist unit formerly worked by Metes.

Dingwell has a bachelor's degree and master's degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She taught pre-kindergarten and kindergarten at Pinewood Elementary School in Omaha for seven years. She was involved in an Early Childhood organizing project which secured monthly plan days for early childhood teachers and paras and also resulted in changes to reporting procedures for every early childhood teacher across the state of Nebraska. Members can reach Dingwell at 402-212-4762.

Story taught second and third grades for six years at Blue Hill and for the past 20 years at Hastings. She has a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and a master's degree from Doane University. She served on the Hastings Education Association negotiations team for years, the past nine as chief negotiator. Members can call Story at 402-469-1025.



Barrett



Copich



Dingwell



Hicks



Lederer



Metes



Story



Wehrbein

Also new to NSEA is Katherine Lederer, serving as associate staff for the Advocacy Department. Lederer has taught at the elementary level – fourth grade – in Fremont for the past six years. She fills the vacancy left by the resignation of Becky Fisher.

Barrett retired on Aug. 14 after 20 years at NSEA. A replacement has not been named.

NSEA Expands Free Webinar PD Offerings

NSEA's schedule of professional development webinars is now supercharged!

A year ago, NSEA offered about two dozen webinars over the school year. The 2020-21 schedule already lists that many sessions, along with a professional development catalog of presentations by NSEA staff and members available on demand.

Of interest are the seven NEA Member Benefits programs scheduled throughout the school year, each of them at least twice. Topics include Women and Money, Life Stage Investing, Student Loan Forgiveness and more.

The professional development sessions offer professional growth to members via Zoom. For details, reach NSEA Organizational Specialist Isau Metes at 1-800-742-0047, or at:

isau.metes@nsea.org

Register at this link:

www.nsea.org/webinars

The schedule (Central time; webinars are an hour, unless noted):

■ **Thursday, Sept. 17, 5:30 p.m.:**

Women and Money.

■ **Tuesday, Sept. 22, 5 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

■ **Thursday, Sept. 24, 5 p.m.:** Student Loan Forgiveness/Reduction. (90 minutes.)

■ **Tuesday, Oct. 20, 6 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

■ **Thursday, Oct. 22, 5 p.m.:** Financial Essentials.

■ **Thursday, Nov. 12, 4:30 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

■ **Thursday, Nov. 12, 6 p.m.:** Life Stage Investing.

■ **Thursday, Dec. 10, 5:30 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

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

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

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

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

■ **Tuesday, Feb. 16, 5:30 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview (Travel focus).

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

■ **Tuesday, March 16, 4:30 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

■ **Thursday, March 18, 5 p.m.:** Financial Essentials.

■ **Tuesday, April 13, 5:30 p.m.:** NEA Member Benefits Overview.

■ **Thursday, April 15, 5 p.m.:** Life Stage Investing.

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What is NSEA Doing for Me?



**Executive
Director
Maddie Fennell**

“

*Our profession
has been forced
to pivot
on a grain
of rice
in order to help
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”

In September 2019, my column in this space was based on the quote “Wherever life plants you, bloom with grace.”

Little did I know how much grace would be needed in 2020....

To say this is a challenging time is a colossal understatement. Our profession has been forced to pivot on a grain of rice in order to help students' mental and physical health while continuing their learning in a multitude of scenarios. At the same time many of us are facing enormous personal changes to keep ourselves and our families healthy.

Add that we are a state that runs 500-plus miles corner to corner with varying degrees of the virus; schools have reopened; school districts have significant local control; district health departments are providing conflicting and ambiguous guidance; the economy is suffering; we are in the midst of major political races....

It's a coronavirus-fueled derecho.

A Continuum of Responses

Great teachers write their lessons plans, but then modify them to meet the needs of individual learners. NSEA has had to do much the same as we work to meet the needs of members who are at every stage of the COVID dial from green to red; from in-person to hybrid to complete remote learning. From those who are ready to be back in their classroom and don't want to wear a mask to those who fear returning to school at all.

In July we sent a survey to all active pre-K-12 members and more than 3,000 responded. When asked, 55 percent of our members said that based on current trends and what they know of their district plan, they were personally ready to return to work in-person in the fall. If given the choice, 39 percent would continue only distance learning in the fall, 31 percent wanted to adopt a hybrid schedule with some in-person teaching and some distance learning and 29 percent preferred to go back to work completely in-person in the fall. More results can be found here:

www.nsea.org/COVID19

As a member-led organization, that meant we needed to support you across the spectrum of experiences you would be facing.

Working Collectively

To amplify our ability to meet your needs, we have been meeting weekly with state and national leadership to learn from each other. The iterative process of the collective has provided us the opportunity to respond much more quickly and, in some cases, get ahead of the curve. What we are facing in Nebraska echoes what our colleagues across the country are facing.

We were also meeting with the NEA legal team and corresponding with legal counsel in nearly every state affiliate. We met multiple times per week with our legal team at Norby & Welding LLP to answer a myriad of legal questions that NO ONE had ever faced. As we researched and responded to new situations and policies, our field staff were

kept up-to-date with the most current information on an almost daily basis.

Widespread Efforts

NSEA President Jenni Benson and I have held regular Zoom calls with local leaders to answer their questions and to keep them current on incoming information. We have continued our Facebook Live gatherings as a public forum to reach out to members and others, as well as emailing each member individually.

We've also worked with new and familiar stakeholders:

- The Nebraska Department of Education now has a panel of teachers they are meeting with monthly through the fall to provide practitioner guidance during COVID. See page 5 for details.

- NSEA communicated with the governor, the Douglas County Board of Health, the Sarpy/Cass Board of Health, and the Omaha City Council regarding the need for masks as their COVID cases increased. See page 7 for details.

- We have worked with UNMC and Children's Hospital on guidance and best practices which you can find at:

<https://bit.ly/NCHEA-School-Guidance>

- We have worked with community leaders who are providing food to families statewide. The NSEA Children's Fund donated \$25,000 to their efforts and the NSEA-Retired added another \$20,000.

- We sent Nebraska media a press release of our survey results to highlight the commitment and concerns of educators as students returned to learning.

Resources for members

The NSEA staff have been hard at work to develop resources for our members. These resources are kept updated on our website at:

www.nsea.org/COVID19

Those resources include:

- An NSEA Educator Bill of Rights During COVID-19;

- NSEA Virtual Learning FAQs;

- Information on School Safety Committees (every district MUST have one by state law!);

- Information on the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (detailing the paid leave for all public-school employees);

- And many more resources that are continually updated.

Just as each of your students has their own story and best way of learning, we know that each of our members have unique circumstances that they need assistance with. We encourage you to work with your local leadership and to reach out to your Organizational Specialist to help with requesting accommodations, securing leave, or answering the questions arising out of our new context. If you don't know who your OS is, you can look in your Member Services Guide or online at:

www.nsea.org/field-staff-units

And know that you can always reach me directly at:

maddie.fennell@nsea.org

October's Fall Conference Made Easy!

Watch, Participate From Comfort of Home

That there has been “a change in plans” has become routine in dealing with the pandemic.

NSEA-Retired's previously scheduled fall conference in Grand Island will still be held – just without the inconvenience of driving to Grand Island!

The conference will be hosted via the Zoom teleconferencing program on Friday, Oct. 16, from 10 a.m. CDT to approximately 11:30 a.m.

After a brief welcome, Nebraska native and former NASA astronaut Clayton “Astro Clay” Anderson will speak. Anderson spent 167 days in space and 38 hours and 28 minutes executing six spacewalks. A model of persistence, he applied 15 times before NASA selected him as an astronaut in 1998, and he spent 30 years working for NASA, 15 as an engineer and 15 as an astronaut.

He is also known for the award-winning book, *The Ordinary Spaceman: From Boyhood Dreams to Astronaut and children's books A is for Astronaut: Blasting Through the Alphabet and It's a Question of Space: An Ordinary Astronaut's Answers to Sometimes Extraordinary Questions*.

Also presenting is Nebraska native Dr. Natalie Hahn, International United Nations official and Malaika Foundation founder.

Hahn served 38 years with United Nations programs in Ethiopia, Malawi, Nigeria, New York City and Rome. Her work with the U.N. included issues such as new food crops and nutrition in Nigeria, women and finance with the International Fund for Agricultural Development, youth initiatives with the Food and Agriculture Organization, UNICEF representative to Malawi and Senior Private Sector Adviser at the U.N.'s Fund for International Partnerships.

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 state representative Alicia Jones of the state's Senior Health Insurance Information Program (SHIP), 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, and there will be prizes drawn from the participant list!

Register at nsea.org/retired, under the Conferences and Events tab. Once registered, a confirmation email will be sent with the Zoom link, passcode and instruc-



Nebraska's Astronaut: Ashland native Clayton Adams will keynote the NSEA Fall Conference on Oct. 16.

tions (prior to Oct. 16, go to zoom.us and download the Zoom application). On Oct. 16, go to the confirmation email and click the Zoom link to join the meeting. You will enter a virtual “waiting room” as your registration is confirmed. It is recommended you consider logging in as early as 9:30 a.m., using your full name upon entering.

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:

dtonack@neb.rr.com

Health Insurance Updates

Details are now available for the updates to the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska's Medicare supplement – the plan previously known as NSEA-Retired Blue Senior Classic.

The updates begin on Monday, Nov. 2, and continue through mid-December. Members can attend the webinar online, or can listen by phone. The deadline to register is Friday, Oct. 23.

Register by going to the NSEA website at nsea.org, and clicking on “For Members” at the top of the home page.

Then click on the NSEA-Retired link and look for the “Fall 2020 Educators’ Medicare Supplement Webinars” to register.

Familiar Faces Return

Longtime NSEA activist Tom Black

will return to the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors in September, representing the Elkhorn District. Black has a long and extensive history of work with NSEA and NSEA-Retired. He served 20 years on the NSEA Board of Directors, including time as an Elkhorn District director, as Elkhorn District president, as NSEA vice president and as one of Nebraska's two members of the NEA Board of Directors.

Black earlier spent 19 years on the NSEA-Retired Board of Directors as president, vice president and Elkhorn District representative. And here's a staggering number: Black attended NEA Representative Assembly 34 times and has been a delegate to NSEA Delegate Assembly 63 times!

Black even earns credit for the NSEA-Retired Intergenerational Program's slogan: “The Wisdom of Age and the Exuberance of Youth.” Black taught at West Point.

Maureen Nickels is also a familiar face to NSEA-Retired. Nickels served as staff liaison to the group for several years while she worked as an NSEA organizational specialist. Nickels will now serve as a retired member of the board, representing the Sandhills District. She continues her love for education in different capacities. She is current president of the State Board of Education representing District 8 in her second term. She taught in Grand Island before working for NSEA and retired in 2017.

Goodbye for Now

Dee Gillham will leave the NSEA-Retired Board after nine years representing the Sandhills District. Gillham said the Nebraska State Education Association has always been very important to her. She was vice president of the Sandhills District for many years and served on NSEA's Instructional and Professional Development Commission. She particularly enjoyed attending Representative Assembly each year in a major U.S. city and serving on the Nebraska Professional Practices Commission.

Francis Rohrich also served on the NSEA-Retired Board for nine years, representing the Elkhorn District. One of his first experiences with the NSEA was serving on the Teacher Welfare and Service Commission for two terms in the 1970s. As a building representative, he made many contacts with new teachers and always made certain they knew the importance of belonging to NSEA.

“Being a board member has been a very rewarding experience as you are in an association with so many talented and ambitious people,” he said.

— De Tonack,
NSEA-Retired President

NSEA Board OKs New, Re-Organized Locals

Community College, K-12 Locals Chartered

June action by the NSEA Board of Directors was the last step in renewal or reorganization that resulted in four newly chartered local education associations.

The 28 members of the **Southeast Community College Education Association** approved bylaws that reconstituted the local for full-time college faculty. The NSEA board then OK'd a charter for the SCCEA.

NSEA Organizational Specialist Rich Wergin said the work of SCCEA members "has been thoughtfully aligned with that of other multi-campus structured bylaws, such as Western Nebraska Community College Education Association and the Central Community College Education Association."

The SCCEA has members at the campuses at Lincoln, Milford and Beatrice. **Lynette Paneitz** is interim president.

A second local, the **Southeast Community College Professional Education Association**, serves the college's staff in counseling, financial services and other professional services areas.

Members of the **Mid Plains Community College Education Association** in North Platte and McCook have merged three locals into one. Associations had existed for faculty at both the North Platte and McCook campuses, with a third local comprised of vocational educators in both cities.

After reviewing pros and cons, Mid Plains leaders, negotiators and members passed bylaws. The NSEA board then approved the unit's charter. The local has a contract for 2020-21, including an addendum to extend the agreement through 2021-22 to allow for the changes needed to form a single bargaining unit.

The NSEA board also approved a charter for the **Summerland Education Association**, a merged school district that includes members of the former Orchard, Clearwater and Ewing school districts.

The Verdigre Public Schools had been merged with Orchard and Clearwater, but is now a stand-alone. Members in that district approved bylaws and formation of the **Verdigre Education Association**.

Omaha North High School teacher and 2020 Nebraska Teacher of the Year finalist **Mark Gudgel** scored two big socially distanced interviews for his English students last spring. During consecutive weeks in April, his students interviewed journalist Soledad O'Brien, executive



Seay



Koch

Freye Elected

The 2020-21 NSEA Member Services Guide mailed in July incorrectly identified the NSEA member elected to a second term on the NEA Board of Directors. Lincoln teacher **Linda Freye** was re-elected in April.

producer and anchor of the weekly television program *Matter of Fact*, and Khaled Hosseini, physician and novelist who authored *The Kite Runner*, the first of his three best-sellers.

The interviews aired as part of Teacher TV, the six weeks of televised teaching NSEA provided to Nebraska students through a partnership with News Channel Nebraska in April and May.

"I think Soledad O'Brien is, frankly, one of the best journalists out there, and if anybody is deserving of her time, it's these kids," Gudgel told KETV.

Peru State College Associate Professor of Education Dr. Darolyn Seay is the college's Teaching Excellence Award winner.

She joined the college faculty in 2008. She teaches professional and collaborative practices; teacher education principles and practices; and teaching science in elementary and middle schools.

Seay just closed six years as the gubernatorially-appointed higher education representative on the Nebraska Professional Practices Board. She has also served as president of the **Peru State College Education Association** and faculty advisor to the Peru State Student Education Association.

The **University of Nebraska at Kearney** has named **Chelsea Bartling** interim director of the school's LaVonne Kopecky Plambeck Early Childhood Education Center.

Bartling taught early childhood education at Grand Island and Kearney. She

held leadership posts at Kearney and was responsible for a variety of tasks at Kearney's Bright Futures Preschool.

She is vice president of the Kearney Area Chapter of the Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children and is a member of the **Kearney Education Association** and NSEA.

Papillion-LaVista Education Association's Jordan Koch has been appointed by NSEA President Jenni Benson and approved by the NSEA board to chair the Teacher Education and School Accreditation Committee (TESAC), an advisory committee to the Nebraska Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). The NCTE develops and recommends standards for teacher preparation and certificate endorsements to the state board of education. TESAC is comprised of NSEA members who serve on the NCTE.

In August, the State Board of Education appointed these members to the NCTE: **Tanishia Jacobs, Bellevue; Dash Rohan, Sioux County; Ed Ventura, Omaha; and Jason Wiese, Arlington.**

Millard Education Association members were at the table as the district worked through the pandemic-related issues last spring. Past **MEA President Paul Schulte** said MEA and MPS collaborated on emails to staff to show "that the MEA had a major voice at the table in the spring and through the summer on how the school year would look."

Schulte and Associate Superintendent of Human Resources Kevin Chick co-signed a May 1 letter to staff expressing pride in staff work, urging grace for staff and others, and to offer support to members struggling during trying times.

A June 9 letter from the two announced wellness program updates and a June 17 letter from Schulte, Chick and incoming MEA President Tim Royers responded to school board action after the death of George Floyd while in Minneapolis police custody. The letter also announced formation of an MEA Ethnic and Minority Affairs Committee.

Just-retired **Norris Education Association** member **Mary Schlieder** scored interviews on CNN and MSNBC in early August, where she spoke of her decision to retire due to COVID-19. A special education teacher, Schlieder was Nebraska's 2008 Teacher of the Year.

Schlieder, 62, told CNN that "I could not foresee a circumstance under which I would feel safe in the building at my age....I'm not the only one worried."

Nurses, Trainers: Free Extra Coverage Additional Liability Now Comes at No Cost

In past years, nurses who teach or supervise in the medical arts area have been able to obtain additional liability insurance through the NEA Educators Employment Liability Program. The insurance was offered at the amazingly low cost of \$13 per year. That is no longer the case: The coverage now comes with membership at no extra cost.

The policy works for both active full- and part-time NSEA members. Those members are covered for the rendering, teaching and supervising activities of nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, dental hygienists, and athletic trainers.

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

Speaking of Education

"I have the feeling that education in a democracy is about the most important public enterprise with which a free people can be concerned."

— **Dr. Archer L. Burnham**
*Educator, NSEA executive director
from 1938-1954*

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

Favorite Book Challenge

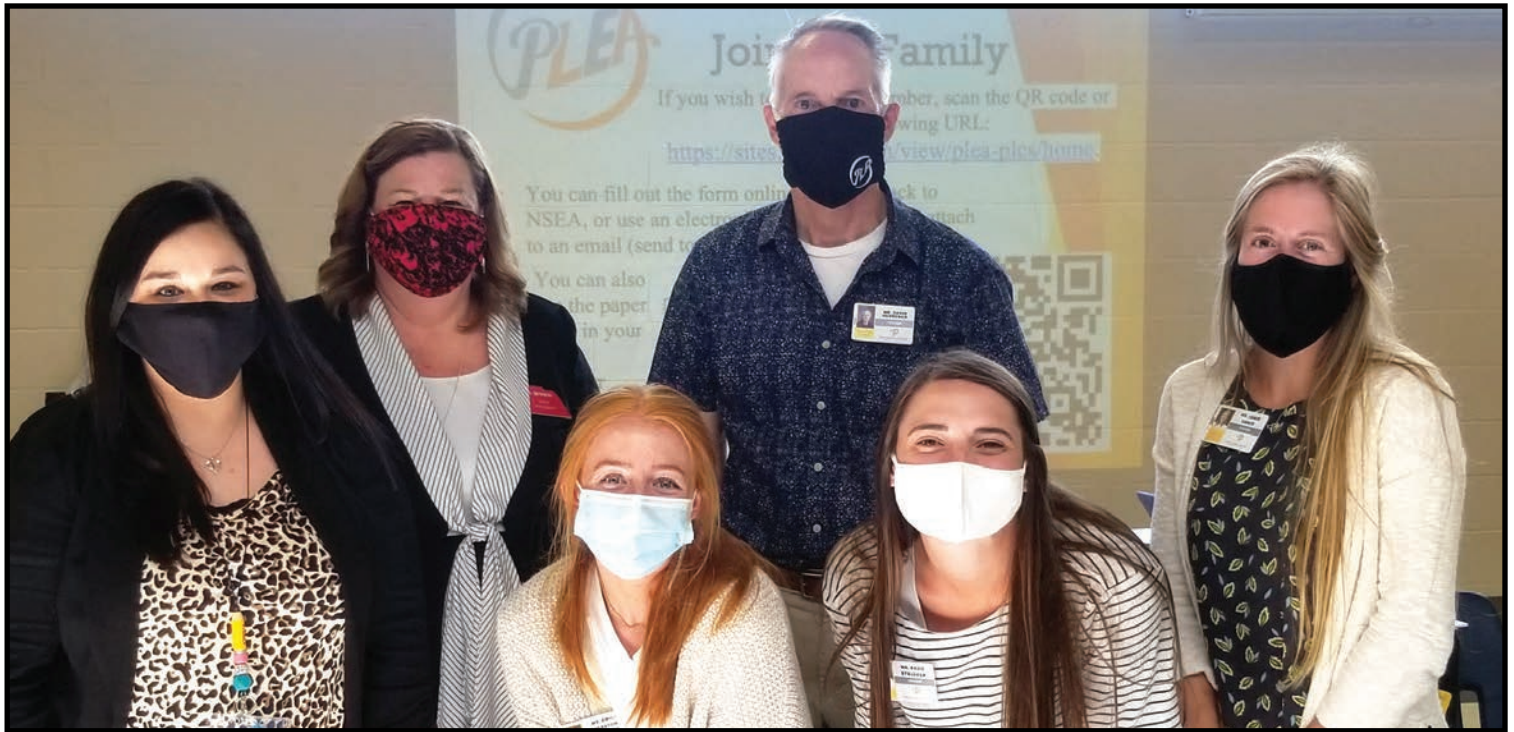
From Katie Snow, a social studies teacher in Tennessee:

"I taught at a middle school with low-level readers. We had a 20-minute SSR period every day. Both teachers and students struggled with it, so I decided to issue a challenge to my students. They thrived on challenges, especially when I was a participant, and I allowed them to set the stakes of this challenge."

"I challenged them both collectively and individually to read a certain number of books per quarter, adjusted according to their reading levels. They challenged me to read their favorite books, many of which I had never read. Each student listed his/ her favorite book, and I was to read at least five a quarter (in a 20 student class). There were rewards or consequences for achieving or not achieving the assigned goals. It did help my students and a few other teachers did similar things in their rooms."



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



New Signees, All Masked Up: These four teachers — new to the Papillion-LaVista School District — were welcomed to NSEA and Papillion-LaVista Education Association membership by NSEA President Jenni Benson and PLEA President Dave Herbener in early August. From left are Cassidy Pflager, Benson, Emily Sherston, Herbener, Kasie Stauffer and Jamie Vance.