

The VOICE

Nebraska State Education Association December 2025

The Heart of the Matter

*The Anatomy
of a Grievance*

• Apply Early for 2026
Certificate Renewal

• NSEA District Seats
are Up for Election

• Trish Guinan:
Farewell for Now



Nebraska State Education Association
605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508
www.nsea.org
402-475-7611 • 1-800-742-0047
Volume 79, No. 4
ISSN Number: 1085-0783
USPS Number: 000-369

Current Exec. Director	Trish Guinan
Incoming Exec. Director	Isau Metes
Assoc. Exec. Director	Shauna Benjamin-Brice
Dir. of Public Affairs, Communications	Cassie Ivy
Asst. Dir. of Visual Communications	Kristi Capek
Multimedia Communications Specialist	Kelsey Foley

NSEA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President	Tim Royers, Millard tim.royers@nsea.org
Vice President	Paul Schulte, Millard paul.schulte@nsea.org
Sec./Treas.	Renae Noble, Chadron nobledr635@gmail.com
NEA Director	Edward Ventura, Jr., Omaha venturaomaha@gmail.com

Official publication of the Nebraska State Education Association, 605 South 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send address changes to NSEA Voice, 605 S. 14th Street, Lincoln, NE 68508.

Published 9 times yearly according to this schedule: October, November, December, January, February, March, April, May and August.

Payment of annual NSEA membership dues entitles Nebraska educators to receive *The Voice*. Total cost of producing 9 monthly issues of *The Voice* each year is less than \$2 per member.

Advertising rates available upon request. All advertisements and advertisers are screened prior to publication. Appearance of an advertisement in *The Voice* does not necessarily imply NSEA endorsement of either the product being advertised or the views expressed.

A Great Public School for Every Child.



www.fb.com/nsea.org



[@nsea_org](https://twitter.com/nsea_org)



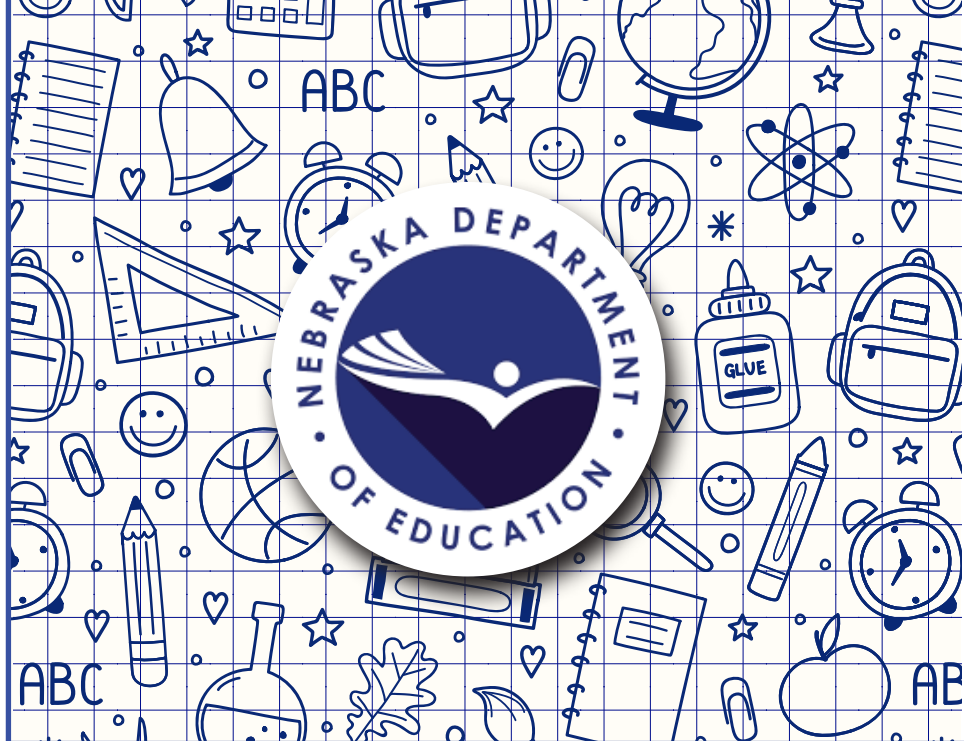
[@nsea_org](https://www.instagram.com/nsea_org)



[NSEAMEDIA](https://www.youtube.com/NSEAMEDIA)



www.linkedin.com/company/nsea



Apply Today for the Teacher Retention Grant

Applications are now being accepted for the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program, which provides financial support to eligible Nebraska educators.

The Nebraska State Education Association said it is grateful for the assistance offered through the program but believes the grant needs significant improvements to cover all teachers. In the upcoming legislative session, the association plans to continue working with Sen. George Dungan to advance LB411, a bill that would expand the program.

Under current law, grants are limited to teachers in their second, fourth or sixth years. LB411 would allow the Nebraska Department of Education to award grants to all educators, regardless of experience. The bill outlines the following annual amounts:

- First through sixth-year teachers: \$2,500;
- Seventh through fifteenth-year teachers: \$3,000;
- Sixteenth year and beyond: \$4,000.

If approved, LB411 would also require that grants be issued automatically rather than through an annual application process. The bill increases the high-needs retention grant from \$3,000 to \$5,000. Educators with endorsements in special education, mathematics, science, technology or dual credit would remain eligible.

Application information is available on page 19. The application period opens Nov. 17 and closes Dec. 17 at 11:59 p.m. CST.

Would You Like to Write for The Voice?

Would you like to write an item for *The Voice*? Perhaps 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: Sometimes advocating for students means standing up to the system. Kimball Education Association member and school counselor Sarah Lewis did exactly that. Read her story on pages 7–8.



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TIM ROYERS

The Future Starts With "What If?"

On April 3, 1973, Motorola engineer Martin Cooper stood on a street in New York City and did something no one else had ever done before: made a phone call using a completely portable device. That first use of a cell phone started us down a journey that impacted so many different elements of society. Since most people are widely aware of the impact of cell phones, I like to focus on the very beginnings of this story. What originally inspired Martin Cooper to even try and design a portable phone in the first place? When he was a kid, he read *Dick Tracy* comics. One of the gadgets the detective had access to was a two-way communicator on his wrist, and Martin wanted to figure out a way to make that happen in real life.

Igniting Imagination

If you find yourself talking to Amazon's Alexa at any point in the day, you also have a similar origin story to the technology that you use on a regular basis. As a kid, Jeff Bezos watched *Star Trek* and saw the crew interacting with a talking computer. He wanted to find a way to turn that concept into a real device that could be used all over the world.

I could list countless other examples, but I think you get the point. We need to remember the importance of imagination. When we think of what the future may hold, it often can inspire others to try and make that future a reality.

And this is especially true in education. The inventions we rely on today didn't begin in laboratories

or boardrooms; they began in the minds of kids who wondered, "What if this were possible?" That same spark is something you see every day in your classrooms, libraries, counseling offices and every space where students bring their curiosity to life.

Your Imagination

Your imagination matters too. Whether it is your ability to inspire the students you work with, or how your vision of a better profession can shape the advocacy our association does, your ideas help determine what comes next. When you picture what the future of public education could be—what your students deserve, what your profession could look like when fully respected and supported—you are doing the same kind of visionary thinking that drives innovation.

Reshaping Education

Thousands of you have completed our surveys that we use to figure out what we can advocate for to support you and strengthen public education in this state. Many of the ideas we are exploring now were not even remotely on our radar until we heard them from members. Your voices didn't just add to the conversation; they reshaped it. They opened new doors, new priorities and new ways of thinking about how to move our schools and our profession forward.

So no matter what, keep on imagining—and keep encouraging others to imagine. You never know who you will inspire to turn that vision into a reality.





Pictured: Organizational Specialists Patrick Fielder and Andy Isaacson sit for a portrait at the NSEA-Aspiring Educators Conference in York. What started as helping Multimedia Communications Specialist Kelsey Foley with lighting checks suddenly became an 80s-style photo moment too good not to capture.

OUR JOY, OUR VOICE

Every day in Nebraska's schools, there are moments that remind us why we do this work—small victories, big breakthroughs, shared smiles and the quiet wins that often go unseen.

Our Joy, Our Voice is a new feature coming exclusively to NSEA's magazine, *The Voice*, created to lift up and celebrate those moments.

Beginning in 2026, we'll showcase the joyful experiences you share from your association, your classrooms, your students and your school communities. Whether it's a personal milestone, a classroom success or just two silly colleagues that made you smile, we want to celebrate it with you.

We are your association, but we are also your community. And your joy is our joy. Send us your moments—big or small—and let us share them with educators across Nebraska. Submit your moment at www.nsea.org/OurJoy.

Apply now for 2026 Belz, Lynch, Krause Grants

Good teachers are always looking to improve their skill set, and the NSEA makes learning easier with an award from the Belz, Lynch, Krause Educational Grant Fund. The 2026 application deadline is Sunday, March 1, 2026.

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

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

- need;
- how the project will address that need and relate to professional growth goals;
- project description;
- timeline;
- a budget statement; and
- methods of evaluating success.

Applications must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST on March



Belz

Lynch

Krause

1, 2026. Recipients will be notified in March.

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

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

Further details and the application form can be found at www.nsea.org/BLK. For questions, contact Chris Garcia at 1-800-742-0047 or email Chris.Garcia@nsea.org.

Blue believes in you

and you and you

NebraskaBlue.com/EHABenefits

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association MG2-005 (10-08-25)



Bearing Witness: Indian Industrial School

Visiting historical sites marked by atrocity is not only an act of remembrance, but a way to better understand the human impact behind historical records. Standing where events unfolded adds context that written accounts alone can't fully convey. Bearing witness at these locations affirms that the experiences of those who lived, suffered or were lost are part of our shared history, not distant or forgotten facts.

In late September, members of the Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee (EMAC) toured the Genoa Indian Industrial School in Genoa. The school was the fourth largest non-reservation boarding school established by the United States Office of Indian Affairs. The village of Genoa was selected because the U.S. federal government already owned the former Pawnee Reservation land. The facility opened on Feb. 20, 1884, and, like other federal Indian boarding schools, its mission was explicit: to eliminate traditional American Indian ways of life and replace them with mainstream American culture.

Children were forcibly removed or coerced away from their families—some as young as four years old. They were separated from their relatives and communities for years at a time. The strict, military-style regimentation, harsh disciplinary practices and grueling labor often left no room for childhood at all.

The students that came to the Genoa Indian School were from more than 10 states and over 40 different tribal



Photo taken in 1910 by the U.S. Department of the Interior, courtesy of the Genoa Historical Museum.

nations. In time, the school grew from the original 74 students to an enrollment of 599 in a single year and encompassed over 30 buildings on 640 acres. The school was in operation through 1934.

"Visiting Genoa was a reminder that history isn't abstract. When you're there—when you touch the bricks, you can imagine the silence of being far from home—it becomes heartbreakingly real," said NSEA Organizational Specialist Megan Lyons.

Historians report that at least 86 students died while attending the school. Records show nine students

were buried on the school grounds, another 37 had their remains sent to their tribal nations and the final resting place of about 40 children remains unknown. The search continues, with tribal representatives from around 40 native nations coordinating next steps alongside state archeologists.

"Standing on that land, you feel a weight that isn't captured in any textbook. These children weren't just names on a roster—they were real, living kids who deserved safety, family and culture," said EMAC member and Title VI - Indian Education Program Director for OPS Tracy Hartman-Bradley. "Bearing witness means confronting that truth and carrying it forward with intention."

The search for answers at Genoa continues, but one truth remains: remembering is an active responsibility. Bearing witness is not the end—it's an invitation to support justice and the families still seeking recognition for the children who never came home.



CHADRON STATE COLLEGE

MAE

Master of Arts in Education

- **Flexible Online Format Available**

- Designed to accommodate working professionals and diverse career goals.

- **Integrated Knowledge Core**

- Built on a foundation of communication and service in education.

- **Affordable Tuition**

- \$412/credit hour
- Special pricing of \$389.40 per credit hour for History/Science/Math

- **Clinical Mental Health**

This degree provides graduates with the academic requirements toward mental health licensure in Nebraska.

- **Educational Administration**

Students are trained in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective administrators according to the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) program recognition standards.

- **History**

Students will be equipped to critically analyze and synthesize scholarly works, engage in academic discourse, and design and deliver effective history lessons using best pedagogical practices and primary sources.

- **Science and Mathematics**

Students will demonstrate strong subject knowledge, apply it effectively in educational settings, communicate concepts clearly, integrate technology in instruction, and connect mathematical sciences to other disciplines.

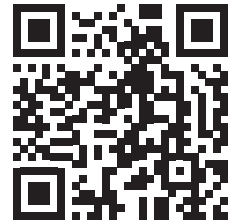
The Master of Arts in Education (MAE) degree program consists of an integrated knowledge core complemented by a coherently focused academic program tailored to meet the needs of students. Based upon the communication and service core of education, this professional degree program provides an integrated master's degree for students pursuing a variety of career choices.



“Completing my degree through Chadron State allowed me to complete my degree in record time in a manner conducive to balancing a career and family alongside my educational obligations. I enjoyed rigorous coursework, supportive professors, and a quality experience all the way around.”

— Val

APPLY TODAY



The Nebraska State Colleges are equal opportunity institutions and prohibit unlawful discrimination and harassment. Chadron State College has designated an individual to coordinate its non-discrimination efforts to comply with regulations implementing Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies and practices may be directed to: Human Resources, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St., Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-432-6224, Email: hr@csc.edu. CSC has also designated an individual to coordinate the college's efforts to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. Inquiries regarding Title IX may be directed to: Title IX Coordinator, Chadron State College, 1000 Main St. Chadron, NE 69337, Telephone: 308-430-0980, Email: titleixcoordinator@csc.edu



Sarah Lewis, Kimball Education Association member and school counselor, sits for an interview at the NSEA Summer Conference in Kearney this July.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER: Sarah Lewis and the Anatomy of a Grievance

For Kimball Education Association member Sarah Lewis, the drive to protect students traces back to her own experience as a struggling elementary student. She didn't know she needed glasses until third grade, leaving her significantly behind in reading. But her fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Holtz, refused to see her as a child who couldn't learn.

"She really pushed me and got me into reading. My fifth-grade year is the year I made the leap from being a non-reader to a reader. And it's because of her," Sarah said.

That moment—of truly being seen—became the blueprint for how she shows up for her students.

"I've always said my job is to be an advocate for kids. They just want somebody to listen to them," she said.

The Heart of an Educator

As a counselor, Sarah supports 504 plans, behavior plans and students carrying unseen trauma. She is often the person reminding educators of the realities their students bring with them. And despite the challenges, she beams when she talks about the daily joy students bring to

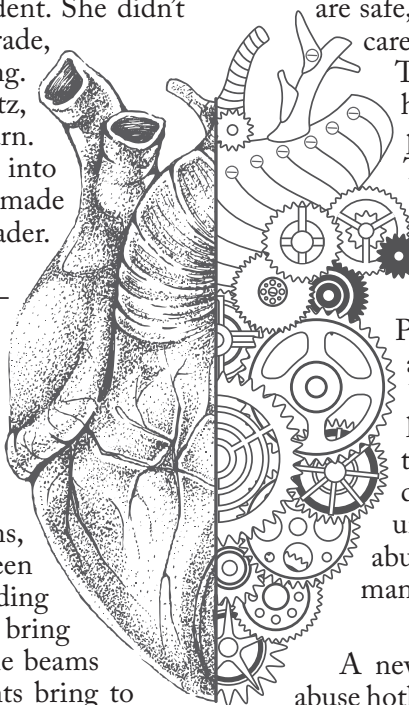
her life.

"My job is for kids. I have a duty to make sure kids are safe," she said, reflecting the heart of her 13-year career in education.

This year, her commitment to students pushed her into the very anatomy of the grievance process—filing one herself for the first time. The ordeal began when local law enforcement inadvertently revealed Sarah's identity as the mandatory reporter in a suspected abuse case, an action that can carry legal consequences under Nebraska's Child Protection Act (Neb. Rev. Stat. §28-711) and related confidentiality protections. That breach set off a chain of events that eventually led her superintendent and school board to introduce a school-wide directive that directly contradicted both state law requiring unhindered, immediate reporting of suspected abuse and federal guidelines safeguarding mandated reporting systems.

The Directive

A new procedure sent to staff required all child abuse hotline calls to be cleared through administration,



with the superintendent holding the final, non-appealable say. Sarah knew immediately that it was not only inappropriate—it was illegal.

“As a school counselor, that impacts my job almost on a daily basis,” Sarah said. “We’re mandatory reporters.”

Before the directive went out to all staff, she had been given an early heads-up.

“I was made aware of the procedure before everybody else was, so first I called my NSEA Organizational Specialist Andrea Longoria right away.”

With Andrea's guidance and support, Sarah attempted an informal resolution, addressing her concern with administration directly. An informal resolution is always the recommended first step in any grievance procedure—but the directive was sent out anyway.

Anatomy of a Grievance

Once the procedure became public, Sarah decided to file a formal grievance.

Grievance procedures in Nebraska schools are legally required. State law—Neb. Rev. Stat. §79-826—implies the need for formal processes when addressing disciplinary actions involving certificated staff.

Federal civil rights laws such as Title VI, Title IX, Section 504 and the Age Discrimination Act also mandate grievance procedures for discrimination complaints. The Nebraska Department of Education further reinforces these requirements through its oversight and regulations, especially in special education and discrimination matters.

As Sarah moved forward, she relied on the key principles needed in the anatomy of a grievance. She knew she had to locate her district's grievance policy and study it closely, because in this process every deadline mattered—one missed timeline meant an automatic denial. She also examined the negotiated agreement to understand what protections were firmly in contract and which board policies could shift without notice.

By grounding herself in the exact steps, timelines and expectations of the grievance procedure, she ensured that her actions were precise, timely

and fully aligned with policy

“My grievance was denied all along the way—from the superintendent and the school board,” Sarah said.

Knowing Nebraska law requires mandated reporters to report directly, she filed a formal complaint with the Nebraska Department of Education after exhausting local procedures. Grievance systems exist for exactly this reason: to follow every step, create a record and escalate only when necessary.

The Quiet Victor

Even though Sarah's grievance was denied at every level, her efforts were far from futile. In the end, the district quietly shifted course. The administration had previously insisted the directive would be included in the handbook—yet it was nowhere to be found.

“I do think my grievance was a reason they didn't make it an actual policy rather than just a procedure,” said Sarah.

And the change didn't end there. In September 2025, her superintendent sent an all-staff email instructing employees to stop following or referring to the directive altogether. During the NSEA Summer Conference in Kearney this past July, Sarah transformed her experience into purpose, leading a session alongside

Andrea titled “The Anatomy of a Grievance” to show others exactly how the process works—and why it matters.

Throughout her journey, Sarah felt supported by her local and NSEA.

“Andrea was behind me whether I wanted to meet with administration one-on-one or whether I decided to file a grievance. I never felt alone,” said Sarah. “I am a member of NSEA because I want the support. I don't want to do this alone.”

Sarah didn't seek conflict, but she also didn't shrink from her responsibility. She followed every step, upheld the law and reinforced the core purpose of grievance processes: to protect rights, ensure compliance and prevent harm.

Her story is one of courage, professionalism and clarity—but also of heart. One of the most important messages she hopes other educators take away from her story: you don't have to navigate a grievance by yourself. NSEA Organizational Specialists are here to support members every step of the way. Members with questions may call NSEA headquarters at 402-475-7611 or toll-free at 800-742-0047 or send questions through the “Contact Us” feature of the NSEA website at www.nsea.org/contact-us.

Looking for a new ride?

DRIVE AWAY with a better auto loan!



When you're at the dealership, simply ask for **First Nebraska Credit Union** – and we'll take care of the financing.

- Competitive rates
- Easy application process
- Serving Nebr. educators statewide

Want a loan pre-approval before heading to the dealership?

Apply online or give us a call!

firstnebraska.org • (402) 492-9100



Serving Educators across Nebraska for 60+ years!

Federally insured by NCUA.

All loans subject to approval. Rates, terms and conditions vary based on creditworthiness, qualifications and collateral conditions.

UNK Is Known to Be One of the **BEST Teacher Education Colleges**

Amber Taylor, UNK Alumnus

Earn your flexible, online graduate degree from UNK in:

Art Education M.A.Ed.

Biology M.S.

Curriculum and Instruction M.A.Ed.

English M.A.

History M.A.

Kinesiology & Sport Sciences M.A.Ed.

Learning Design & Technology M.S.Ed.

Music Education M.A.Ed.

Physical Education M.A.Ed.

Reading PK-12 M.A.Ed.

Spanish Education M.A.Ed.

Special Education M.A.Ed.

STEM Education M.S.Ed.

and many more!



Experience the Power of the Herd:
unk.edu/online

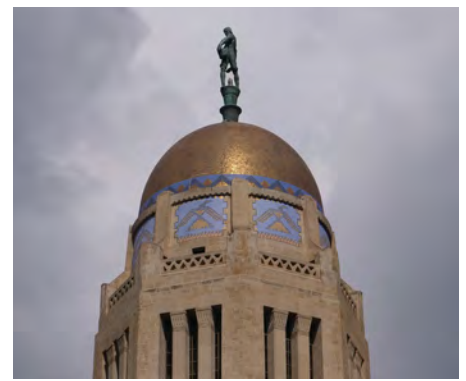


UNK ONLINE

Advocacy IN ACTION



Capitol District Senator Dinner held Nov. 6: 1. Lincoln Education Association member Shari Anderson, Sen. George Dungan (Dist. 26), NSEA President Tim Royers, Stephanie Nantkes and Sen. Danielle Conrad (Dist. 46). 2. Sen. Jane Raybould, NSEA-Retired members Joe Shandera and De Tonack, and member Diane Lamb. 3. Sen. Tom Brandt (Dist. 32). 4. LEA members engaged in conversation with President Royers. 5. Waverly Education Association member Gina Boltz, with LEA members Liz Carranza-Rodriguez and Kate Regler. 6. NSEA-Retired member Pat Shepard with Capitol District President Julie Colby.



2026 Legislative Session Outlook

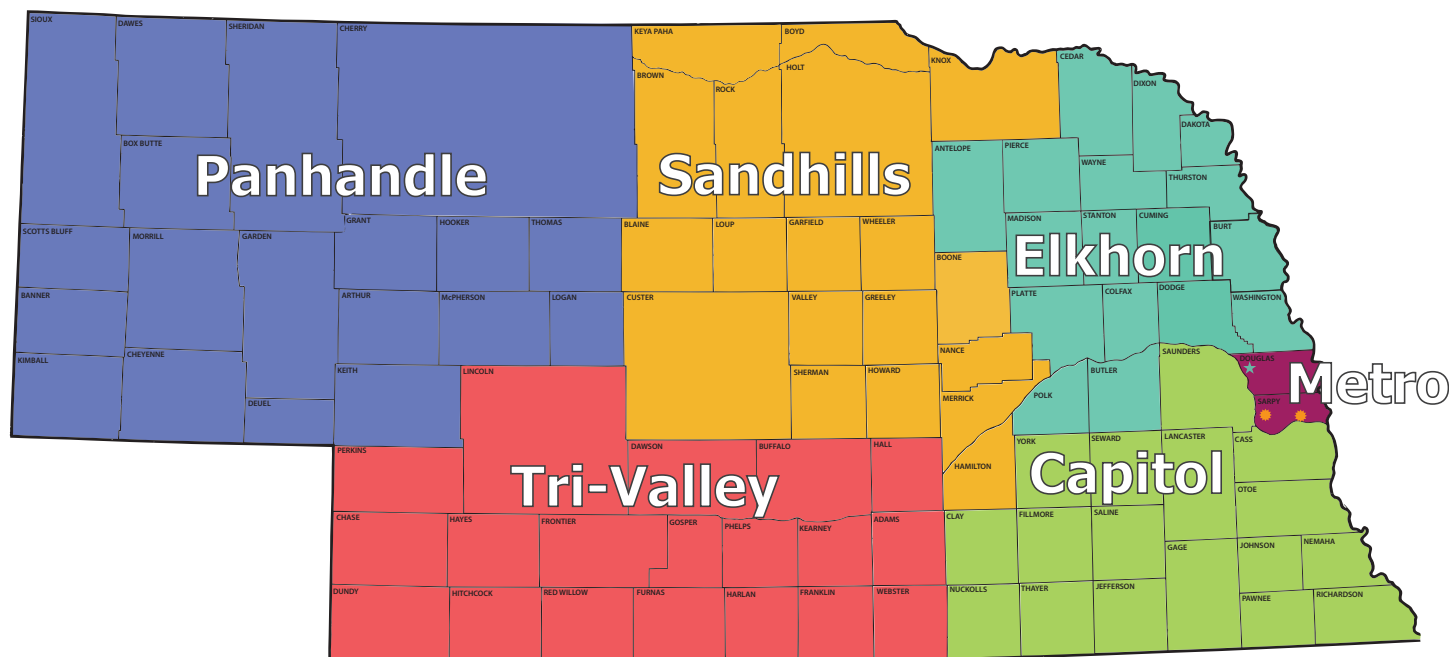
The second session of the 109th Legislature will convene Jan. 7, 2026. The 90-day session is expected to cover a wide range of proposed bills that will affect Nebraska public education—our public schools, students and staff.

Every decision regarding education is a political decision. Hot topic issues such as funding, teaching certificate requirements, the number of students in your classroom, the standards and curriculum you teach, the resources you access and the amount on your paycheck—all of these issues are tied to legislative action.

The NSEA government relations team monitors legislative activities and advocates for the best interests of members, students and public education. Legislative bills can change quickly throughout the session and NSEA works to keep you in the loop about how your job as an educator or education support professional may be affected.

A flagship priority remains advancing LB440, the Education Leave and Support Act, which would provide paid family and medical leave for teachers. Although the bill did not pass in 2025, its reintroduction could significantly strengthen recruitment and equity—particularly for early-career educators navigating life events such as maternity leave.

These goals, however, face fiscal headwinds. A projected state revenue shortfall could complicate budget deliberations. Stay up-to-date about legislative activity and decisions affecting public education with NSEA's Capitol Update, sent to your personal email inbox each week of the legislative session. Subscribe at www.nsea.org/subscriber.



In order to comply with NEA guidelines, the Gretna Education Association and Springfield/Platteview Education Association will be included in Capitol District, and Metro Community College Education Association is included in Elkhorn District.

Your leadership is needed!

Several NSEA leadership positions will be up for election in 2026, and members are asked to consider the role they could play as a leader in the Association.

The window for filing for the 26 open positions on NSEA district boards and the NSEA Board of Directors will begin on Thursday, Jan. 1, and will close on Sunday, Jan. 25. Election of members as at-large delegates to the NEA Representative Assembly will occur during the same timeline.

Election for NSEA Vice President will take place at Delegate Assembly 2026. Watch the January digital edition of *The Voice* for details on that filing process.

NSEA members will vote for district positions beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 6. On that date, members with valid personal email addresses on file will receive an email detailing the process. Voting will close at midnight on Sunday, March 1.

To file, visit nsea.org and click on "2026 District Elections." Select your district, then choose the office you seek. Candidates will need their 10-digit NSEA membership number. Your number can be found above your name on the mailing label of *The Voice*. Call NSEA if you have

questions: 1-800-742-0047.

The filing process allows candidates to post a 50-word statement for voters to read. Type the statement in a Word or other text document and then paste the statement into the appropriate box during the filing process.

NSEA encourages minorities to seek office at all levels. NSEA's Minority Involvement Plan says, "It shall be the goal of the Association to seek minority representation on governing and appointive bodies at least equal to the percentage of minority membership for that appropriate level."

Members can elect the next round of NSEA leaders by casting a ballot in the Association elections.

Email Address Needed

NSEA members without a valid email address on file will receive a postcard explaining the voting. If you do not receive a postcard or an email from NSEA by Friday, Feb. 13, call 1-800-742-0047.

Update your e-mail address with NSEA by calling 1-800-742-0047 or sending an email to membership@nsea.org. Members should use a personal email account, not a school-issued one.

Vacancies

A statewide look at NSEA leadership opportunities for 2026-27:

CAPITOL DISTRICT

- Vice President
- One seat on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

ELKHORN DISTRICT

- President
- Two seats on executive committee
- One seat on NSEA Board

METRO DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Three seats on executive committee (subdistricts 4, 7 and 10)
- Two seats on NSEA Board

PANHANDLE DISTRICT

- President
- Two seats on executive committee (areas 1 and 4)

SANDHILLS DISTRICT

- President
- Two seat on executive committee

TRI-VALLEY DISTRICT

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Two seats on executive committee (One West, one Central)
- One seat on NSEA Board

AE Fall Conference: Keynotes, Connections & Mini Canvases



Top photos: 1. Aspiring Educators members listen to a keynote by NSEA Director of Political Action Brian Mikkelsen. 2. Aspiring Educator Executive Team share a laugh with keynote speaker Dr. Calvin Krogman. **Bottom photos:** 3. AE members take part in the career fair during the fall conference. 4. AE members get creative with tiny canvas art.

Members of the NSEA-Aspiring Educators from across Nebraska gathered at York University on Nov. 14–15 for the annual Fall Conference and Career Fair. The two action-packed days were filled with connection, learning and inspiration.

The conference kicked off Friday night with guest speakers, including NSEA President Tim Royers. Dr. Calvin Krogman, a high school math teacher at Isanti Community School in Santee, delivered a powerful presentation on the 12 Lakota Virtues, weaving in personal stories and experiences from his own Lakota heritage. An alumnus of the Upward Bound/TRiO programs, Dr. Krogman has dedicated his career to promoting educational access and lifelong learning—work he believes is essential in helping students and communities thrive.

After dinner, students got creative with a mini canvas-painting activity led by former art teacher turned NSEA Organizational Specialist, Teresa Matthews, bringing fun and hands-on learning to the evening.

Saturday was packed with professional growth and career exploration. The morning featured a keynote from NSEA Director of Political Action Brian Mikkelsen on the importance of getting politically involved, followed by a panel of retired teachers who shared incredibly insightful career and life advice. Participants also celebrated Nebraska's 2026 Excellence in Teaching Award winner Lori Pflaster, a Special Education teacher at Sandoz Elementary in Lexington. Pflaster's presentation was followed by a Special Education panel, providing practical strategies and

inspiration for aspiring educators.

In the afternoon, incoming Executive Director Isau Metes delivered an inspiring keynote, sharing personal letters from her former students—written in response to a prompt asking what she should never forget about being a student. Her talk highlighted the profound impact educators have on students' lives and amplified the voices of those students in a powerful way.

The conference wrapped up with the career fair, giving participants the chance to meet face-to-face with school districts from across Nebraska and take advantage of free professional headshots.

The AE Executive Team set out to spark connection and strengthen career pathways at their Fall Conference—and this year's event certainly delivered.

Have a student teacher? Sign them up for Aspiring Ed!

A semester of student teaching is a unique time for an educator, and it's the perfect time to surround oneself with support from other new and seasoned educators.

If you have a student teacher in your classroom this year, encourage them to become a member of the NSEA-Aspiring Educators. You may even set aside some time to walk them through the process and help them understand the myriad of benefits they'll receive as a member of the Association.

Feeling especially generous? Pay their Aspiring Educators dues—just \$40 for the year!

Benefits of membership for

Aspiring Educators include student loan forgiveness workshops, access to year-round professional development opportunities, big savings through the NEA Discount Marketplace, the \$1 million Educators Employment Liability insurance policy and much more.

First-year educators will also benefit from involvement in NewGEN, NSEA's New Generation of Educators in Nebraska. The organization is comprised of early career educators in their first seven years of teaching who network and support each other through the challenges of a new teaching career.

For more information or to help

a new member register, go to www.nsea.org/JoinNow, or contact the NSEA Membership Department by calling 1-800-742-0047 or emailing membership@nsea.org.



Bargaining Meetings Held Statewide

Throughout November, NSEA held bargaining meetings across the state to give local negotiators a chance to gather and share ideas for the bargaining season.

Held at convenient locations across the state, including South Sioux City, Hastings, Kearney, Beatrice and Gering, the sessions combined practical information with collaboration, providing local bargaining teams an invaluable opportunity to prepare for the critical discussions ahead.

Attendees explored NSEA and local association bargaining goals, state aid updates, property tax levies and lids, and the latest information on health insurance premiums. The meetings also served as a platform to address emerging issues and share insights on legislative developments affecting education funding.

In addition to broad topics, associations with shared arrays came together to refine bargaining goals and strategies. These collaborative discussions fostered idea-sharing, helped teams identify common challenges, and enabled participants to develop stronger, more unified approaches for negotiations.

By the end of the sessions, attendees left not only more informed but also better prepared to advocate effectively for their members and communities.



**PUBLIC EDUCATION
IS AN INVESTMENT
IN NEBRASKA.**

**TELL UNL TO STOP THE CUTS:
bit.ly/UNLStopTheCuts**

aaup
UNL



Turn to the NSEA Children's Fund This Winter



Educators routinely go far beyond the duties outlined in their job descriptions. Many spend their own limited income to ensure that students have what they need—whether it's a warm coat, a pair of glasses, or the supplies required to participate fully in class. But even the most dedicated teacher can't shoulder every burden alone. Recognizing this, the Nebraska State Education Association established the Children's Fund in 1994 as a way to support students facing urgent needs that fall outside traditional resources.

Since its creation, the Children's Fund has distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to help students overcome real-life obstacles that could otherwise hinder their learning. These donations have covered essential expenses such as vision care, clothing, medical treatment, emergency relief after home fires, and even transportation challenges. For many students, this support has meant the difference between falling behind and thriving.

There is never any red tape or lengthy delay for members wanting to use the fund to help a student. A call to Karen Hunt at the NSEA (800-742-0047) is usually all that is needed. For more information, visit nsea.org/childrensfund.



Don't Delay! Apply for 2026 Certificate Renewal Early

Educators who need to renew their certificate in 2026 may want to complete their application early to avoid processing delays with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).

Each year, the NDE sends certificate renewal reminders to thousands of Nebraska educators. The teaching certificate is valid for teaching in all Nebraska school systems and must be renewed every five years. Certificates expire on August 31 each year. Backlogs at the department in recent years have sent members to NSEA for help to get answers about the process. In 2024, the department hired additional staff to help manage certificate renewals. This year, the department is encouraging

certificated teachers who will need to renew in 2026 to apply between the months of January and March.

"This will help with the processing time for their certificates and not put them in a bind if they wait until it gets closer to August when our office has many new grads that are working through the system," said NDE Director of Educator Certification, Katelyn Larson.

Teachers who are unsure if their certificate expires this year can log in to the Nebraska TEACH portal and check the expiration date: teach.education.ne.gov/#/verifylicense.

To renew, log on to: teach.education.ne.gov/#/ and start an application. The application can be found at the top of the account portal.

2026 Delegate Assembly Approaching Fast

Plans are underway for the April 2026 Delegate Assembly. Delegates will gather April 24–25 at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel, where NSEA President Tim Royers will lead the 166th assembly in the Association's history.

The Delegate Assembly is NSEA's annual business meeting, bringing together members from across Nebraska who are elected by their local associations to represent both large and small, urban and rural school districts. These 23,000 members rely on their delegates to manage the business of the Association, set priorities, and help chart the course for NSEA's future.

During the assembly, delegates will participate in keynote presentations, discussions of pressing educational issues, and consideration of updates

to NSEA Bylaws and Resolutions—all critical elements that guide the work of the Association and shape its advocacy efforts. Members can watch for detailed updates in upcoming editions of *The Voice*.

The assembly also celebrates excellence in education. Awards presented during the event recognize outstanding professionals, including the Early Career Educator of the Year, Educational Support Professional of the Year, the Teaching Excellence Award recipient, NSEA's 2026 Friend of Education, and additional honors. Full award details, including eligibility and deadlines, can be found in the article below, on this page.

To attend as a delegate, members must be elected by their local association. Anyone interested in

serving should contact their local association president, building or faculty representative, or NSEA organizational specialist to express their interest. Serving as a delegate is an opportunity to have a meaningful impact on the Association, advocate for your peers, and take part in decisions that affect educators and students across Nebraska.

As the state's oldest professional education association, NSEA has held Delegate Assemblies nearly every year since its founding—and in some years, twice a year—to ensure members have a voice in governance and policy decisions. The 2026 assembly promises to continue this long tradition of collaboration, leadership, and celebration of educational excellence.

Shine a Spotlight on an Exceptional Educator



Meet Mary Reynolds-East

Millard Education Association Member Mary Reynolds-East received NSEA's Award for Education Support Professional at the 2025 Delegate Assembly.

Now is the time to discuss who you or your local association might nominate for one of the honors awarded at Delegate Assembly in April. Any NSEA member may nominate a member teacher, Education Support Professional (ESP) or deserving group. The 2026 Assembly will be held April 24–25 at Lincoln's Cornhusker Marriott Hotel. Members are eligible for:

- **Early Career Educator Award:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in their first five years of teaching.
- **Award for Teaching Excellence:** Honors a teacher who has excelled in the classroom over a period of time.
- **Education Support Professional of the Year Award:** Honors an ESP who has excelled in their job. Finalists will be notified in March, with winners announced at the assembly. Recipients receive a \$250 cash award.
- **Community Service Award:** Honors NSEA members or local associations involved in volunteer work outside of classroom hours.
- **The Tom Black Local Public Relations Award:** Honors local associations for outstanding internal communication.

Members can also nominate individuals or groups for these awards:

- **The Great Plains Milestone Award:** Honors an individual or group for promoting human and civil rights.
- **Administrator of Excellence Award:** Honors a public school administrator who strives every day to help students and staff be successful.
- **Friend of Education Award:** NSEA's highest honor is presented in recognition of an individual or organization that has made a statewide contribution to education or to Nebraska educators.
- **Outstanding Media Award:** Honors a newspaper, television or radio station for coverage of education issues and promotion of public education.

Nominations may be submitted online at www.nsea.org/DA or mailed to NSEA Awards, 605 S. 14 St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. All nomination materials must be received at the NSEA office no later than 5 p.m. on Feb. 6, 2026.



Make the most of your new **MEMBERSHIP!**

Find out how NEA Member Benefits can help you:

- Reduce student debt
- Save on travel and everyday items
- Get insurance that fits your schedule
- Sign up for free life insurance
- Plan ahead for retirement

And so much more!

nea *Member
Benefits*

Scan below
to learn more





TRISH GUINAN

“

Every step of this journey has been shaped by people who believed in me, challenged me and stood beside me, and I am deeply grateful for the part each of them played in getting me here today.

”

Message from the Executive Director

Farewell for Now

As many of you know, after nearly 50 years in public education and 29 years with NSEA, I will be retiring at the end of December. Saying goodbye after so many years feels impossible, so instead, I'll say what feels more honest: farewell, but not forever.

Serving this Association has been the honor of my professional life. From my early years as a secondary and college math teacher, to joining NSEA as a field representative in 1996, to leading Member Rights, Advocacy, and ultimately serving as your Executive Director, this work has shaped who I am. It has challenged me, strengthened me and reminded me every day why public education matters.

Something New

I have had the pleasure of seeing many former colleagues enter retirement and, from their continued presence within our Association, I can assure you that my retirement isn't an ending for my advocacy—it's simply the start of something new.

I am looking forward to the chance to be a better family member and friend, mother and wife. I look forward to time spent without an agenda, to showing up more fully for the people I love and to rediscovering who I am outside of deadlines, negotiations and policy briefs.

I want to recognize that I would not be here without the countless mentors, friends and family members who have pushed, pulled and encouraged me along the way. Their guidance steadied me during difficult moments, their confidence lifted me when mine wavered and their support made it possible for me to grow into each new role. Every step of this journey has been shaped by people who believed in me, challenged me and stood beside me, and I am deeply grateful for the part each of them played in getting me here today.

NSEA and the Future

I leave this role with tremendous confidence in the team that will lead NSEA into the future. Beginning Jan. 1, Isau Metes will serve as Executive Director. For those who know Isau—her heart, her integrity, her fierce commitment to educators—you understand why I say this transition gives me complete peace of mind. I worked closely with Isau when she elevated to the role of Advocacy Director, a position I was honored to serve in for 22 years. She served alongside me after being promoted to serve as the associate executive director. I can tell you through this close personal relationship, she will serve our members with vision and strength.

Shauna Benjamin-Brice is stepping into the role of Associate Executive Director, bringing deep experience in human resources, recruitment and leadership.

Together, Isau and Shauna form a team that is thoughtful, capable and prepared to protect public education and to advocate relentlessly for the professionals who make it possible.

All NSEA Members

To our governance leaders, to the Board of Directors and to every member who has stood with us through victories and challenges—you have my gratitude.

Your work, your voice and your belief in this Association have carried us forward year after year.

As I step back, please know that I am not stepping away. NSEA will always have a piece of my heart. I will be cheering you on, celebrating your wins and trusting fully in the future you are building.

Thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you. Thank you for the memories and the friendships. And thank you for the work you do every day to strengthen public education in Nebraska.

This is farewell—but not forever.



ELECTIONS AHEAD!

Consider running for one of the leadership roles in NSEA-Retired.

Candidate filing for the upcoming elections will be available online at nsea.org/retired by Jan. 1, 2026. Filing deadline is Feb. 5, 2026.

Open Seats

NSEA-Retired leadership opportunities for 2026-27:

NSEA-RETIRED PRESIDENT

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

NSEA-RETIRED VICE PRESIDENT

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

CAPITOL-1 DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

ELKHORN DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

SANDHILLS DISTRICT DIRECTOR

- 3-year term
- Term begins Aug. 15, 2026

True Perspective



NSEA-Retired panelists wait to take the stage as Aspiring Educators member Anton Goodwin shares high-fives and laughs with them on his way back into the Miller room.

NSEA-Retired members recently answered the call to serve as panelist at the NSEA-Aspiring Educators Fall Conference in York. LEA-Retired President Joe Shandera, Dr. De Tonak, NSEA-Retired Vice President Roger Rea, Susan Stake, Shari Paden and Lisa Christiancy all served as panelists.

As student attendees listened, panelist spoke from the heart giving new teachers something invaluable: true perspective. Having lived the profession; the NSEA-Retired panelists understand its challenges and joys in ways no handbook ever can. They offered guidance to help newer educators stay grounded, resilient and inspired.

During the conference, a student asked a panel of retired teachers, “What would you say to someone considering not becoming a teacher because of the pay?”

The panelists acknowledged the reality of the question, but they quickly shifted to a deeper one: in the scheme of things, you won’t measure your life in dollars—you’ll measure it in lived experiences. Several panelists shared stories of former students who contacted them long after leaving the classroom to express gratitude for the support that shaped their lives.

They explained that while teaching may not top salary charts, it offers a kind of wealth few professions can match. They spoke about the moments that define a teacher’s career—the breakthroughs, the quiet acts of trust and the handwritten notes of former students who say they were seen, encouraged or changed by their influence. Those are the markers of a life lived with purpose.

“You can’t put a price tag on that,” Rea said.

They also encouraged new teachers to think beyond their first few years in the classroom. As Dr. Tonak put it.

“Thanks to NSEA and all of their work for that extremely strong, almost 100% funded pension plan. Now, I’m sure the 21-year-olds are saying, *This lady is talking to me about pension?* But it is good. It is not something you’ll find in many other fields your peers will be entering.

Her point: your future self will thank you. In the end, that was the message these retired educators hoped to leave with the next generation—teaching is more than a job. It’s a lifelong investment in others, and ultimately, in yourself.



2025-26

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant

The NDE is excited to launch the 2025-26 school year Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program (TRRA). Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 79-8,112, the purpose of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Act Grant Program is “to provide financial incentives to recruit and retain teachers in Nebraska classrooms.” This program is open to teachers from public and nonpublic schools, as well as teachers employed by an ESU.



The retention grant is for **\$2,500** for teachers in their 2nd, 4th or 6th year of teaching. This includes time teaching outside of Nebraska.



The high-needs grant is a one-time grant for **\$5,000** for teachers who have been issued an endorsement in specific high-needs areas with a contract to teach in that area. You can check your issue date of your endorsement at: teach.education.ne.gov. It must be issued on or after 6/2/2023.



The guidelines and application can be found at: education.ne.gov/csds/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-act/ or by scanning the QR code.

The first step is filling out the application. If selected, additional documentation will be necessary.



The application will **open November 17, 2025 and closes on December 17, 2025, at 11:59pm CST** and applicants will be notified no later than January 31, 2026. If you qualify for both grants you can apply for both grants.

NEA 150 Presents Family of teachers

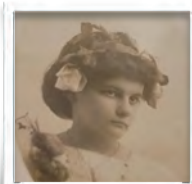
Every legacy has a beginning. For Hastings Education Association member Rebecca Hoobler, originally from Norfolk, that legacy spans 23 years of teaching by the end of this school year—despite the fact that, growing up, she insisted she would never follow in her parents' footsteps. School was difficult for Rebecca due to hearing loss, and she never imagined choosing education as a career. With the support of a speech teacher and a reading specialist, she gained confidence, especially in math, where she enjoyed challenging herself. At that time, special education services were limited. As a teenager, she found purpose in babysitting—particularly caring for two children with Cystic Fibrosis—and volunteering with nonprofits, church groups and youth organizations.

In 2000, Rebecca began her professional journey as an Autism/Behavior Disorders para-educator in Special Education at Belmont Elementary in Lincoln. She later earned a Master's Degree in Special Education (Autism and Behavior Disorders) in 2010 and holds seven endorsements—five of them in Special Education. Over the years, she has taught in a variety of settings, with her favorite areas being Early Childhood Special Education (Birth–5 years), Life Skills and Alternative Education. She currently serves as a resource teacher at Hastings Senior High.

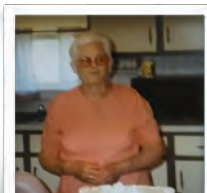
This summer, Rebecca realized she is a fourth-generation teacher. Her mother, Marion, moved to Nebraska from New York, where she later met Rebecca's father—a sixth-grade teacher at Westside Elementary in Norfolk. Marion taught briefly before Rebecca was born, then substituted while raising Rebecca and her brother, Jeff. She returned to full-time



Marion, Rebecca and Dennis Hoobler



Martha Alder



Maxine Raph

teaching once Jeff started kindergarten, ultimately teaching math at Norfolk Catholic (Sacred Heart), Norfolk Junior High and Norfolk Middle School before retiring in 2007 after 35 years. Rebecca's father, Dennis, began teaching at just 18 years old in rural Loup County, where he grew up. He attended Kearney State (UNK) during the summers while teaching in a one-room schoolhouse—where he even taught his younger sister and several cousins. After earning his degree, he moved to Norfolk and spent 33 years teaching 5th and 6th grade at Westside Elementary. He retired in 2000 after an incredible 42-year career.

The family's teaching roots stretch back even further. Rebecca's grandmother Maxine, great-grandmother

Martha Alder, great-aunt Elva Ralls and cousin Conda Hoobler all taught in rural Nebraska schools.

Rebecca's cousin Troy's wife, Jodi Hughes, dedicated 29 years to teaching in Grand Island Public Schools and in New Mexico. Altogether, her family has contributed more than 150 years of service to education.

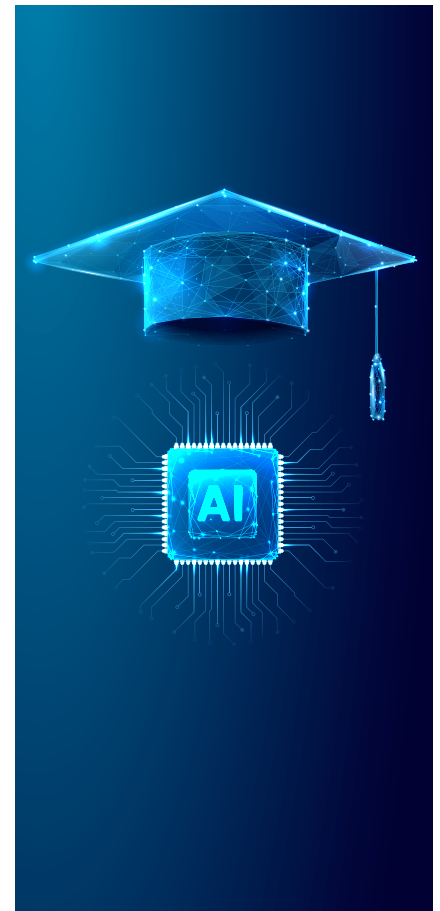
When people ask Rebecca why she became a teacher, she laughs and says, "I don't know—it just came naturally." Her brother Jeff still teases her about joining the family profession, but Rebecca simply smiles and replies, "Someone needed to carry on the tradition."

Rebecca's journey reminds us that one family's dedication to children and community can create a legacy that spans generations.

Rebecca's story shows how one family's dedication to children and community can span generations.

Does teaching run in your family?

Share your story and be featured in Family of Teachers at www.nsea.org/Family.



NEW WEBINAR: Dec. 17 Practical AI Strategies

Educators interested in bringing meaningful, age-appropriate artificial intelligence into their instruction can join NEA and ISTE on Wed. Dec. 17, for a hands-on webinar exploring how AI can support deeper learning in grades K–7. The session begins at 6:30 p.m. CT / 5:30 p.m. MT.

The event will introduce **Empowering Learners for the Age of AI: An AI Literacy Framework for Primary and Secondary Education**, a new guide designed to help teachers integrate AI tools in ways that promote critical thinking, creativity and essential skill-building.

Featured presenters include Veronica Ellis of Teach AI and two classroom teachers who will offer practical strategies, classroom-tested examples and ready-to-use ideas educators can implement immediately with students. Register at www.bit.ly/AI-NEA-17.