



Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

Member Update

December 4, 2025



Photo Credit: Minden Public Schools



www.nrcsa.net



www.twitter.com/NRCSA1980



www.facebook.com/nrcsahome/



NRCSA Calendar

NRCSA Events

NRCSA Legislative Forum

February 26, 2026

Cornhusker Hotel in Lincoln

[More about this event](#)

NRCSA Spring Conference

March 18 & 20, 2026

Crowne Plaza & Younes North Convention Center in
Kearney

[More about this event](#)

NRCSA Golf Tournament

July 28, 2026

Meadowlark Hills Golf Course in Kearney

[More about this event](#)

Committee Meetings

NRCSA Executive Committee

9:30 AM January 20, 2026

Via Zoom

NRCSA Legislative Committee

9:30 AM Thursdays during hearings

Via Zoom

NRCSA Scholarship & Recognition Committee

February 26 & 27, 2026

NCSA Conference Room

At the NCSA Building in Lincoln

NRCSA Executive Committee

3:00 PM March 18, 2026

Bronze 5 Room

At the Crowne Plaza in Kearney



NRCSA Search Service

Please let Jack Moles know where superintendent vacancies occur, so that NRCSA Superintendent Search can make direct contact. We need to hear as soon as possible in anticipation of getting promotional materials specific to that board of education ready. It is critical that Board Presidents have the NRCSA contact information so that if they choose to consider a Superintendent Search Service, NRCSA is one they hopefully will consider.



Axtell Community Schools
Search Complete



Sandy Creek Public Schools
[Notice of Vacancy](#)
[Apply for this Vacancy](#)

Application Deadline: **Dec. 15, 2025**
Finalists Selected: **Jan. 5, 2026**
Interviews: **Jan. 10, 2026**
Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools

Application Process Complete
Finalists Selected: **Nov. 17, 2025**
Interviews: **Dec. 6, 2025**
Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Hampton Public Schools

Application Process Complete
Finalists Selected: **Nov. 21, 2025**
Interviews: **Dec. 6, 2025**
Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Hayes Center Public Schools
Search Complete



Potter-Dix Public Schools
Search Complete



Red Cloud Community Schools
Interim Search

Access the Members area of www.nrcsa.net anytime.

Login: member Password: learning

NRCSA Updates

From NRCSA Executive Director Jack Moles: At the NRCSA Executive Committee's meeting on November 19, I informed the Committee of my intention to retire at the end of the current school year. While we don't know an exact end date, it will likely be sometime this coming summer. The Executive Committee will utilize the NRCSA Superintendent Search Service in conducting a search for my replacement. I would encourage anyone who has interest in the position to contact me and I will provide as much information about the position as possible.

I will write more at a later date, but I do want all to know that being the Executive Director of NRCSA has been one of the topmost highlights of my professional career. I truly loved being a teacher, a coach, a Principal, and a Superintendent, but I believe this has been my favorite role in education.

I plan to do all I can to assist the Executive Committee in the search, short of actually taking a role in choosing my replacement. That is the job of the NRCSA elected leadership and I will support them all that I can. I am already making plans on how to support the next NRCSA Executive Director.

Application information for NRCSA Scholarships and nomination information for NRCSA Awards were sent out right after Thanksgiving. One change to the Scholarships was approved by the NRCSA Executive Committee at its November 19th meeting. We are increasing the number of NRCSA scholarships for students entering the field of education when they go to college. We have been awarding 20 such scholarships for the past several years, but will now increase the number of scholarships to 23. These scholarships will remain at \$2,000 per recipient. We will still offer two Gary Fisher Fine Arts Scholarships in the amount of \$2,000. That means that NRCSA will be awarding a total of \$50,000 in scholarships to 25 students from NRCSA-member districts! Please help by making sure that students are aware of the scholarships. We did send notice of the scholarships to each member district's high school Counselor.

Each year NRCSA recognizes several individuals with our "Outstanding" Awards to a worthy Board of Education Member, Superintendent, Principal, Elementary Teacher, Secondary Teacher, Music Teacher, ESU Staff Member, and Classified Staff Member. You all have outstanding individuals in your schools—please consider nominating them for these awards.

Each year, one of the recipients of one of the Outstanding Teacher Awards (Elementary, Secondary, and Music) is chosen to be NRCSA's nominee for the National Rural Education Association's Rural Teacher of the Year Award. NRCSA's nominee for the 2025 award was Kari Schroder of Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca. Kari was the runner-up for the NREA Award this year. She was awarded a teacher's bell by the NREA.

NRCSA Leadership

Chris Kuncel, President.
Mullen Public Schools

Dr. Heather Nebesniak, Past Pres.
Ord Public Schools

Stephanie Kaczor, Pres-Elect.
Riverside Public Schools

Jeremy Braden, Secretary.
Doniphan-Trumbull Public Schs

District Representatives:

Ginger Meyer, West
Chadron Public Schools

Dale Hafer, North Central
Ainsworth Community Schools

Daryl Schrunk, Northeast
Randolph Public Schools

Andrew Havelka, Southeast
Freeman Public Schools

Jon Davis, South Central
Alma Public Schools

Jane Davis, Southwest
Hershey Public Schools

Executive Director:

Jack Moles

Lobbyists:

Jon Edwards
Scott Moore
Russell Westerhold

Legislative Co- Chairs:

Dr. Jason Dolliver
Pender Public Schools

Bryce Jorgenson
Southern Valley Schools

Scholarship & Recognition Co Chairs:

Jessica Bland,
Oakland-Craig Public Schools

Jim Widdifield
Minden Public Schools



KARI SCHROEDER (CENTER), WITH SYRACUSE ADMINISTRATION & NRCSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JACK MOLES

NRCSA held all of its committee meetings on Wednesday, Nov. 19 in conjunction with the NASB/ NASA Education Conference in Omaha. Some of the outcomes from these committee meetings include:

The Executive Committee:

- approved a move to add three \$1,000 NRCSA Scholarships which go to students from NRCSA-member schools. The students must be entering the field of education.
- approved the adoption of an “event cancellation policy”. The policy, which will be shared in the January Member Update, lays out the procedures for late cancellations of those who are signed up for events. NRCSA must commit to meals prior to hosting events. The policy will address how refunds are made for cancellations.
- agreed to partner with the Holocaust Learning Experience. This group provides free teacher materials that can be used in meeting Rule 10 requirements in teaching the Holocaust and other genocides. More information will come out later.
- accepted an invitation from the University of Kansas Literacy Grant. Member schools that choose to participate will receive grants and participating teachers will receive stipends.

The Scholarship and Recognition Committee made a recommendation to make terms on the committee three years instead of two. This will serve to make terms the same as those on the Executive and Legislative Committees. The Executive Committee will vote to approve the move at its January meeting.

The Legislative Committee discussed several “rumored” legislative issues.

The Closing the Achievement Gap Committee is working on a plan which would ask for districts to apply for recognition of their intentional work in closing the achievement gap between students in poverty and students not in poverty. More information will come later.

SUPERINTENDENT SEARCH & PLANNING

As Boards of Education and Superintendents start to plan for the future, there may be a change in Superintendent approaching your district. We would like to remind you that NRCSA has an outstanding Superintendent Search Service and I would encourage your Board of Education to closely consider these services if you are in need of a Superintendent.

NRCSA has already helped the Axtell, Hayes Center, and Potter-Dix Boards of Education identify their next Superintendent. We are currently assisting Hampton, Bancroft-Rosalie, and Sandy Creek Boards of Education with their searches. We are also assisting Red Cloud in a search for an Interim Superintendent.

One of the more outstanding features of the NRCSA Superintendent Search Service is that the consultants who assist Boards of Education with their searches are all retired rural school Superintendents who experienced great success in their careers. They know what it takes to be successful in a rural school district and community, and how to work closely with a rural school Board of Education. Our current consultants are: Jim Havelka, Fred Helmink, Robin Stevens, Rob Hanger, Caroline Winchester, Curtis Cogswell, Mike Cunning, Paul Sheffield, Mo Hanks, and Jay Bellar.

If your district finds a need to locate your next school leader, please be sure to keep the NRCSA Superintendent Search Service in mind. For more information you can contact Executive Director Jack Moles at jmoles@nrksa.net or by phone at 402-335-7732.

Another service that is offered is a planning service. It is a common practice for Boards of Education and the Superintendent to develop short and long-term plans. We are currently assisting Anselmo-Merna in their planning process. NRCSA does provide a quality service using experienced consultants. If you are interested in more information, please contact Executive Director Jack Moles.

[NRCSA Search Service Brochure](#)

[NRCSA Planning Support Brochure](#)

The School Financing Review Commission, which was created last Spring by the Unicameral, has had four meetings thus far. Information on the meetings can be found on the NDE website at <https://www.education.ne.gov/commissioner/school-financing-review-commission/>. The committee has presented its preliminary report to the Unicameral.

The Commission is made up of 18 individuals and is chaired by Commissioner of Education, Dr. Brian Maher. Senators on the Commission include Sen. Dave Murman, Sen. Jana Hughes, and Sen. Eliot Bostar, as well as former State Senators Lou Ann Linehan, Tom Briese, and Fred Meyer. Individuals from the Education world include Brady Superintendent Ann Foster, Pender Superintendent (and NRCSA Legislative Co-Chair) Jason Dolliver, Bennington Superintendent Aaron Plas, Millard Superintendent John Schwartz, Lincoln Associate Superintendent Liz Standish, Lakeview Board of Education President Keith Runge, Omaha Board of Education member Shavonna Holman, and Chancellor of the Nebraska State College System, Dr. Paul Turman.

The Nebraska Statewide Workforce & Educational Reporting System (NSWERS) has released a new research brief examining chronic absenteeism in Nebraska's K–12 schools and its effect on student outcomes, including assessment scores, graduation rates, and college enrollment.

The analysis highlights that chronic absenteeism—defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year for any reason—has risen sharply in Nebraska since the COVID-19 pandemic and remains persistently high. Rates jumped from 10 percent in 2019–2020 to nearly 24 percent the following school year and have since remained

above 20 percent statewide.

Key Findings from the NSWERS brief:

- Nebraska's chronic absenteeism rate has stabilized but remains elevated at more than one in five students.
- Disparities exist across student race/ethnicity, with Indigenous/Native American and Black students showing the highest rates of chronic absenteeism.
- Chronically-absent students consistently score lower on statewide assessments (NSCAS and ACT) compared to their peers.
- Chronic absenteeism greatly reduces the likelihood of graduating on time; students with regular attendance are nearly six times more likely to graduate high school than their chronically-absent peers.
- College-going rates show a significant divide: nearly 71 percent of non-chronically absent graduates enroll in postsecondary education compared to just 49 percent of chronic absentees.

"These findings underscore the lasting impact of chronic absenteeism on students' academic progress and future opportunities," said Dr. Jay Jeffries, author of the brief. "Addressing absenteeism requires not only monitoring the type of absence but also understanding the characteristics of students who are chronically absent."

The full report, NSWERS Brief on the Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Academic Outcomes in Nebraska, is available at:

<https://insights.nswers.org/briefs/2025-chronic-absenteeism>

A year ago, NRCSA introduced a new initiative to assist rural schools in educating their communities about digital citizenship. Our partnership with A.Plum Creative will provide members with ready-to-use, research-based resources designed to help districts promote responsible technology use among students and families.

The program has its origins out of a goal by the Hershey Board of Education and Superintendent Jane Davis to work on digital citizenship in their district. The district worked with A.Plum Creative on the initiative, then shared information on the program with the NRCSA Executive Committee.

This research based, legally vetted campaign includes monthly social media graphics and captions that focus on key topics like online safety, respectful communication, digital wellness and appropriate tech use. All content is designed to engage school communities and support districts in meeting digital citizenship education goals.

We offer a set of tiered service options for NRCSA Member Districts:

- Tier 1 – NRCSA Branded Content (\$2,500/school year): Monthly graphics and captions with NRCSA branding, aligned to seasonal themes and events.
- Tier 2 – District-Branded Content (\$5,000/school year): Customized graphics and captions tailored to your district's brand and messaging.
- Tier 3 – Custom Content + Consultation (\$7,500/school year): District-branded content plus three planning calls per year with A.Plum Creative.
- Tier 4 – Full Social Media Management (\$10,000/school year): District-branded content, full posting and scheduling, community engagement and monthly performance reports.

This campaign is available exclusively to NRCSA member districts. To learn more or reserve your spot, contact Anna Weber at anna@a-plum.com or visit www.a-plum.com.

Good Life EDU Podcast Featuring Anna Weber & Jane Davis

Recently, Minden Superintendent Jim Widdifield contacted the NRCSA office to see if we could be in assistance in helping him conduct a survey concerning Early Childhood programs in our rural schools. We assisted him with dissemination of the survey and he recently shared results.

From Jim: I have finally completed putting this together for those who filled out the survey. I received a good response from 87 schools. I appreciate all the schools that took the time to complete the survey. I did not include the specific schools in the results, but instead grouped them by size.

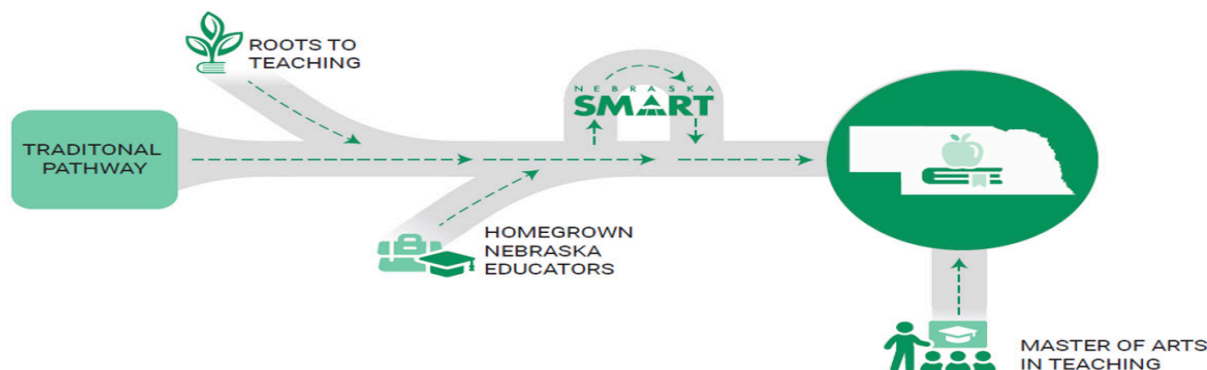
I share this information with you, not only because it has some very good information on Early Childhood programs, especially as it pertains to age groups, numbers of staff, and funding sources, but also to remind you that if you are wanting to research something please keep NRCSA in mind. Sometimes we already have compiled the information you are looking for. Also, if you want to do surveys, we can help you to disseminate the survey materials.

Nebraska Pre-School Programs

I recently had a communique from a member Superintendent as to the history of Equalization Aid in his district. That is something we keep track of on an annual basis for all districts, so his request for help was very easily filled. Again, at NRCSA we may have already compiled information you might be wanting to find. All you need to do is ask!

Expanding the Educator Pipeline through Innovative Nebraska State College Initiatives.

Educator Preparation Pathways



The Nebraska State Colleges (Chadron, Peru, and Wayne) are proactively addressing the growing teacher shortage across the state, particularly in rural communities. With their evolution beginning as Normal Schools to present, and approximately 28% of undergraduate students majoring in teacher education (the largest comprehensive major system-wide), the Colleges have long played a central role in preparing future educators.

However, as Nebraska faces increasingly urgent staffing shortages in K–12 classrooms, especially in high-need areas such as special education, early childhood, and STEM, the State Colleges continue to evolve to meet this challenge through four strategic initiatives.

Nebraska Roots to Teaching (NRT), seeks to offer a high school-to-career educator pathway modeled after Washington State’s successful Recruiting Washington Teachers (RWT) program. Anchored in Wayne State College’s STEP (Students to Teachers through Educator Pathways) program, NRT is expanding dual credit options in education across the three colleges. High school students (especially first-generation and underrepresented learners) will be able to complete introductory education courses for dual credit, participate in campus-based experiences, and receive mentorship from teacher-mentors and college “navigators” throughout their transition into college and early teaching careers. Flexible modalities, financial incentives, and future paraeducator

credentialing further broaden access for rural students.

The **Homegrown Nebraska Educators Apprenticeship Program** seeks to leverage new flexibility under Nebraska Department of Education Rules 20 and 21 to provide an alternative pathway to certification for paraprofessionals and place-bound adults. Building on Chadron State College's pilot model, this initiative allows candidates to remain employed in their local districts while completing a bachelor's degree and teacher certification. Courses are fully online and asynchronous, ensuring flexibility for working adults. The program emphasizes district-identified endorsement areas, such as special education and elementary education, and uses a competency-based credit model to reward relevant experience.

The **Nebraska SMART (Success Made Accessible through Rural Tutoring)** initiative connects teacher education candidates from the three State Colleges with K–12 students in their home districts through virtual tutoring. Focused on supporting rural schools, SMART offers academic help during afternoons and evenings while providing early, meaningful field experience for teacher candidates. By allowing candidates to serve students in their own communities, the program strengthens local ties and broadens access to educational support. SMART not only improves outcomes for K–12 learners but also enhances the preparation of future educators committed to serving Nebraska's rural schools and communities.

Lastly, the **Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)** is a distinct, graduate-level program designed for individuals who hold a bachelor's degree in a core content area and seek teacher certification in Nebraska. Delivered fully online, the 18-credit core of the program ensures that individuals fully meet certification requirements and provides a flexible path to licensure, while the additional 18 credits of the graduate program provide options to complete the required content courses to qualify for teaching dual credit courses or work toward specific endorsement requirements. Individuals can choose to complete the core course which lead to certification without committing to the MAT; however, the completion of the MAT graduate program assists individuals in completing elective coursework that moves them toward their career goals. Unlike the Homegrown Nebraska Educators apprenticeship model, which supports paraprofessionals pursuing a bachelor's degree, the MAT serves adult career changers and professionals seeking a direct, advanced entry into the teaching profession.

Together, these initiatives form a comprehensive ecosystem of entry points into the teaching profession. From high school dual credit options and rural tutoring roles to full apprenticeship models and flexible graduate pathways, the Nebraska State Colleges are creating scalable solutions to address Nebraska's critical teacher shortage, ensuring every community has access to well-prepared, locally rooted educators for years to come.

Chris Prososki, formerly the Superintendent at Southern and now at Hastings, has shared a sample Superintendent Checklist that he uses. I thought this was a great instrument, one that I wished I had available to me when I was in the Superintendency. It can be especially helpful as you head into the new school year! Thanks to Chris for sharing this! You can access the updated checklist here:

[Superintendent Check List](#)

NRCSA has had the great privilege to work closely with Open Sky Policy Institute over the years. They provide great information on the fiscal impact of legislation that is very helpful to me in my work as NRCSA's chief lobbyist. I would encourage Superintendents and Board of Education members to sign up to receive Open Sky's email updates.

Open Sky has developed some awesome **Nebraska Public School District Profiles** instruments. The instruments provide much information that can be used to tell the story of your district in comparison to other districts when discussing school finance. The instruments can be accessed at:

<https://www.openskypolicy.org/school-district-profile/>

The mission of OpenSky Policy Institute is to provide impartial and precise research, analysis, education and

leadership on fiscal policy-improving opportunities for all Nebraskans. Subscribe to their email updates at <https://bit.ly/OpenSkyUpdates> or contact Todd Henrichs at thenrichs@openskypolicy.org.

As we head into the new legislative session, Open Sky has shared a few more tools that can be especially helpful. A message from Rebecca Firestone, Executive Director for Open Sky shares:

Dear friends,

On behalf of the team at OpenSky, I want to thank you for the work you have done to prepare for the important policy work ahead for all of us this year.

We wanted to take an opportunity to share a few quick reference materials we have developed that we think will be especially useful this session (attached).

- 1. A one-page guide to TEEOSA, the K-12 public school funding formula. With significant changes promised to the formula in pursuit of property tax relief, we felt it was important to share the current state of play.*
- 2. A guide on the budget process, including a timeline, who is involved, and a breakdown of important components of the state budget. With a significant deficit heading into session, lawmakers will grapple with complex decisions regarding spending. At OpenSky, we are ready to work towards a budget that reflects the priorities of Nebraskans and allows everyone a shot at The Good Life, and we look forward to partnering with you in this work.*

I also wanted to introduce you to some new members of our team who you may interact with during the upcoming session:

Lillian Butler-Hale joins our team as Outreach and Engagement Director. She replaces Joey Adler Ruane, who will continue to support OpenSky for some time from his new role with the lobbying firm Lindsay Harr MacDonald. Lillian was most recently in the office of Senator Jen Day and will be a great asset to the team during this session. Please make sure to say hello when you see her in the rotunda.

Noah Rhoades just joined us in a new role as Outreach and Engagement Manager. He will support our legislative work as well as community engagement and outreach efforts, including coalition building. We are excited to have him on board.

We are also launching a refreshed website at www.openskypolicy.org, and last, but not least, we have moved! Same building, bigger office. Please make note that our new address is 1325 H Street, Suite 200 Lincoln, NE 68508. We look forward to welcoming you to our new space soon, when we are a little more settled.

We are excited to work alongside all of you this session, and here to be a resource. Don't hesitate to reach out to me or anyone on the team if you need us.

*Onward,
Rebecca*

[Open Sky TEEOSA Guide](#)
[Open Sky Budget Process Guide](#)

NRCSA is pleased to be in a partnership with New Leaf Teletherapy. New Leaf provides mental health teletherapy services for both staff and students. I became very interested in this possibility especially in terms of staff services. I know our members are working hard to provide services for their students, but there does not appear to be that same capability when looking at staff services.

I look at this service as helping to bolster what your district is already doing, not to take the place of those efforts. I believe this can be a cost effective means of furthering your efforts.

NRCSA hosted three introductory Zoom meetings with Mark Goldman and Deb Romano of New Leaf to have them explain what the program would look like. Below you can access the slide show from those meetings, as well as a recording of one of the meetings.

[New Leaf PowerPoint Presentation](#)

[New Leaf Zoom Meeting](#) (recording)



[New Leaf Flyer](#)

If you would like to be in contact with Mark Goldman or Deb Romano, please feel free to call or email me and I can help make that happen.

One of the more outstanding student academic activities that I've had the pleasure of working with is Academic Decathlon. The nation-wide program provides a prescribed course of study each year. Teams are made up of students of different academic abilities. Students with an "A" average compete against other students with an "A" average, students with a "B" average compete against other students with a "B" average, and students with a "C" average compete against other students with a "C" average. Schools can choose how they prepare for competitions. Some teams meet after school or in the evenings, while some schools offer a class.

There is a regional competition in January, with the State Championships being held in February. Students compete for medals at both events. Scholarships are awarded to members of teams who are successful in the competitions. Three of my four children competed in Academic Decathlon and between them were awarded thousands of dollars in scholarships.

This past year, two NRCSA-member schools qualified for the State Championship: Amherst and Johnson County Central.

Each year there is a central theme for the Academic Decathlon curriculum. For the 2025-26 school year, the theme is "The Roaring 20's". Music, art, and literature will cover the Jazz Age.

If you would like get more information on the Nebraska Academic Decathlon, please contact NRCSA Executive Director Jack Moles of one of the Nebraska Academic Decathlon Co-Executive Directors:

Ardis Moody ardis.moody@gmail.com

Cris Hay-Merchant chaymerchant@bellevue.edu



JOHNSON COUNTY CENTRAL ACADEMIC DECATHLON TEAM



AMHERST ACADEMIC DECATHLON TEAM

The NRCSA Executive Committee has made a positive move to assist non-traditional educators move toward full teaching certification. As a result of this move, new scholarship opportunities were created for paras who are in a “para to teacher program” and for transitional educators. NRCSA will provide three \$1,000 scholarships for the fall semester and three \$1,000 scholarships for the spring semester for the 2024-25 school year. Applicants for the scholarships must be current employees of a NRCSA-member district or ESU. Applicants must be enrolled for that semester in one of two types of programs: (1) in a recognized “para to teacher” program such as is offered by the three State Colleges (Chadron State, Peru State, or Wayne State), or (2) a transition to teaching program in which a person with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree who is employed to teach in a member school while working through a transitional program, such as offered by the University of Nebraska-Kearney. The applicant could currently be teaching under a transitional certificate. Application materials for Spring scholarships were distributed to member Superintendents and ESU Administrators, who were then asked to share with potential candidates in their buildings. The NRCSA Scholarship and Recognitions Committee selected the three Spring semester scholarship winners.

Applications for the Spring semester were received and the three recipients have been selected. They will be notified over the next couple of weeks.

NRCSA has developed a “resource” document to assist members when they want insight on a particular topic. Often we are contacted and asked if we know of a school that has experience in a topic of interest. Many times we can point them in the right direction, but often we need to put out a request for information to the members. We have developed a list to begin from and already have some contact information on some of the topics. The plan is to feature this list in each of our monthly updates. Below is a link to a copy of the list. If you would be willing to be listed as a resource or if you would like to suggest other topics for inclusion, please contact Jack Moles.

[NRCSA School Programs](#)

We urge you to consider participation in the NRCSA Partner OneCard program as a tool for you in managing school expenditures, both large and small. Certainly, the card can help reduce/eliminate any issues relative to unverified cash expenditures. You decide who uses it, can get cards for each of those users, keep all cards wherever you wish, determine the amount to load on each individual card, and how long the time frame of use is. It is a terrific management tool and clearly identifies each expenditure/name/date/amount. Whether small purchases or very large purchases, the card is a terrific tool. NRCSA owns the state contract, so liability for misuse falls to NRCSA, not the district user. We have only had three circumstances of fraud and all three have been the theft of the card number information, not any district employee misuse. For 2024-25, over 100 districts/ESUs participated in the program. We currently have **109** entities using the program. In talking with some districts, there is a chance there could be upwards of 112 entities participating. Great job by all participating districts in protecting the card and program! Don’t forget, the NRCSA rebate from the transaction fee paid by businesses that choose to accept plastic is used for scholarship, awards, and special needs. For 2024-25, the rebate was over \$34,000 to NRCSA, showing that use is increasing, and large purchases are being included. WIN, WIN, WIN! If you are considering joining the program and need more information, please contact Jack Moles (jmoles@nrdsa.net) or Jeff Bundy (jbundy@nrdsa.net).

U.S. Bank provided two webinars for those considering using the program or for those who are currently using it, but want to find out more about the program. The slides from the webinar are available below.

[U.S. Bank Commercial Card Program](#)

Board of Education meeting visits. Beginning in December, 2019, I started attending Board of Education meetings in member school districts/ESUs. Since then, I have attended 140 such meetings. I most recently attended the Board meetings at Creighton on Monday, Nov. 10, Doniphan-Trumbull on Tuesday, Nov. 11, and

Syracuse on Monday, Nov. 17.

I am scheduled to attend the following Board of Education meetings in the near future:

Monday, December 8: Superior

Tuesday, December 9: Riverside

Monday, December 15: Blue Hill

I have really enjoyed this venture and am willing to attend Board meetings when I can. I take a few minutes to cover NRCSA news and offerings, as well as a legislative update. When I am going to be in a specific area on Board meeting days I may send out a notice to near-by Superintendents to make an offer to visit. I'd like to be able to schedule two or three in the same evening if I can.

If you would be interested in me attending a future Board meeting, please contact me to start the arrangements. I would also be willing to "attend" your Board meetings via Zoom if you preferred. I would still only do one at a time but would be able to do several in the same evening. Let me know and we will try to make the connection.



CREIGHTON BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



DONIPHAN-TRUMBULL BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



SYRACUSE-DUNBAR-AVOCA BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION

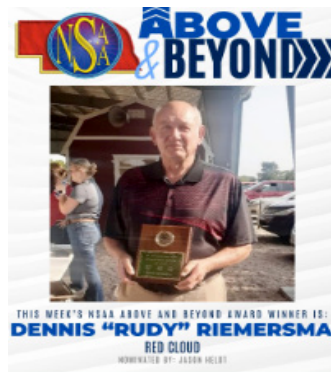


NRCSA wishes to share in the celebration of the special accomplishments and recognitions going on in our member schools and ESUs.

December 2025:

*** The NSAA's Above and Beyond program is designed to recognize and celebrate the outstanding individuals who make a meaningful impact within their communities. Whether it's a student, coach, community member, or parent, this award honors those who go the extra mile to support and uplift others. The NSAA recognizes an individual each week. Individuals from NRCSA member school districts who have been recognized to date are:**

- November 12: Five individuals from different communities acted quickly at the State Cross Country Meet when a spectator went into cardiac arrest. The NSAA cited Brady Principal Samantha Pavelka, Jodi Erikson of Blue Hill, Creighton Principal Ryon Nilson, Kari Nilson of Creighton, and Thedford Principal Adam Kuntz for having a hand in helping to revive the spectator and coordinate contact with first responders and notifying the spectator's family.
- November 5: Dennis "Rudy" Riemersma of Red Cloud.
- October 29: Natasha Haupt of Leyton.



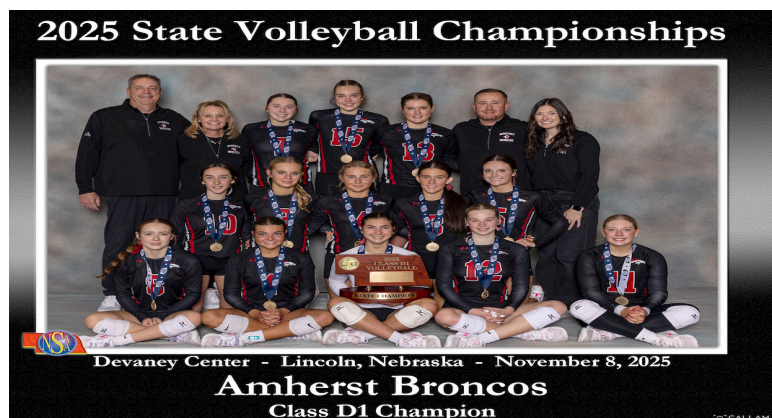
*** Milford won the Class C1 State Volleyball Championship. Holdrege was the Runner-up.**

*** Freeman was the Class C2 State Volleyball champion. Laurel-Concord-Coleridge was the Runner-up.**



FREEMAN FALCONS, CLASS C2 STATE VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONS!

*** Amherst won the Class D1 State Volleyball Championship. Overton was the Runner-up.**



*** Wynot was the Class D2 State Volleyball champion. Cambridge was the Runner-up.**



*** Four students from NRCSA-member schools were selected to play in the Nebraska Coaches Association's Senior Softball Showcase. They are: Rylie Beethe (Johnson-Brock, but playing for Nebraska City), Payton Burbach (Central City), Libby Loman (Northwest), and Jolie O'Hara (Northwest)**

*** Several students from NRCSA-member schools received first team All-State recognition for softball in the Omaha World-Herald (OWH) and/or the Lincoln Journal-Star (LJS). They were:**

- ALL CLASS: Graclyn Simmons, Northwest (OWH)
- CLASS B: Graclyn Simmons, Northwest (OWH), Abby Dinkelman, Northwest (OWH), Becca Dinkelman, Northwest (OWH), Bella Zach, DC West (OWH)
- CLASS C: Payton Burbach, Central City (OWH), Jordyn Campbell, Yutan/Mead (OWH), JLee Van Driel,

Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

Twin River, OWN, Lauren Suntych, Centura, (OWH), Izabelle Greenough, Fort Calhoun (OWH), Juno Ryan, Central City (OWH), Emma Jacobs, Centura (OWH), Emma Brandes, Central City (OWH)

*** NEBpreps and Hurrdat Sports recently announced their outstanding players for each class in volleyball. Those from NRCSA-member schools who were honored include:**

CLASS D2:

- Player of the Year and Hitter of the Year: Taryn Arbuthnot, SEM
- Setter of the Year: Haley Wieseler, Wynot
- Libero of the Year: Jaylin Geisen, Wynot

CLASS D1:

- Player of the Year: Daisy Ryan, Overton
- Hitter of the Year: Kaydence Haase, EMF
- Setter of the Year: Aspen Billeter, Southwest
- Libero of the Year: Breckyn Veskerna, Amherst

CLASS C2:

- Player of the Year: Briar Ray, Oakland-Craig
- Hitter of the Year: Ashley Beethe, Johnson County Central
- Setter of the Year: Riley Wellensiek, Johnson County Central
- Libero of the Year: Keislyn Poss, St. Paul

CLASS C1:

- Player of the Year and Hitter of the Year: Shayla Rautenberg, Milford
- COACH OF THE YEAR: Erin Heath, Holdrege

*** The Nebraska Coaches Association recently released Super State and Class All State Teams for Boys and Girls Cross Country, Boys Tennis, and Girls Golf. Students from NRCSA-member schools who were recognized included:**

- SUPER STATE GIRLS GOLF: Peyton Hartman (Adams Central), Mia Hiebner (Heartland), Daleni Knust (West Holt), KayLynn Jorgensen (Minden), Macy Jorgensen (Minden), Julia Messere (Aurora)
- SUPER STATE BOYS CROSS COUNTRY: Isac Portillo-Munoz (Lexington), Trevor Zurn (Alliance), Tyler Hetz, (Gothenburg), Elijah Goodell (Perkins County), Kaser Johnson (Doniphan-Trumbull)
- SUPER STATE GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY: Scout Bell (Gothenburg), Avery Arens (Crofton)
- CLASS B ALL STATE BOYS CROSS COUNTRY: Isac Portillo-Munoz (Lexington), Trevor Zurn (Alliance)
- CLASS C ALL STATE BOYS CROSS COUNTRY: Tyler Hetz, (Gothenburg), Avery Carter (Milford), Nolan Gartner (Syracuse), Trevin Huskey (Johnson County Central), Samuel McQuistan (Holdrege), Bryson Neels (Gothenburg)
- CLASS C ALL STATE GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY: Scout Bell (Gothenburg), Macie Carter (Milford), Addison Hauxwell (Chase County), Hailey Hengtgen (Palmyra), Tayla Hurner (Wayne), Emma Williams (North Bend Central)

Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

- CLASS D ALL STATE BOYS CROSS COUNTRY: Elijah Goodell (Perkins County), Kaser Johnson (Doniphan-Trumbull), Hector Bonilla (Wood River), Samuel Holsing (Tri County)
- CLASS D ALL STATE GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY: Avery Arens (Crofton), Kayleigh Betka (McCool Junction), Rarity Cournoyer (Gordon-Rushville), Sage Holtmeier (Tri County), Reagan Moody (Ainsworth), Delani Runnels (Niobrara/Verdigre), Madison Shaw (Sandy Creek)

*** The Nebraska Coaches Association and HUDL recently announced their coaches of the year for some of the fall sports. Coaches from NRCSA–member districts who were recognized include:**

- SOFTBALL: Mitch Sadd, Northwest
- BOYS CROSS COUNTRY: Corey Hatt, Doniphan-Trumbull
- GIRLS CROSS COUNTRY: Troy Hauxwell, Chase County



*** Several NRCSA-member schools won the Sportsmanship Award for the State Volleyball Tournament. The award is annually presented by the Nebraska Coaches Association and Currency. Winning the award were:**

- CLASS D2: Dundy County-Stratton
- CLASS D1: Southwest
- CLASS C2: Johnson County Central
- CLASS C1: Malcolm



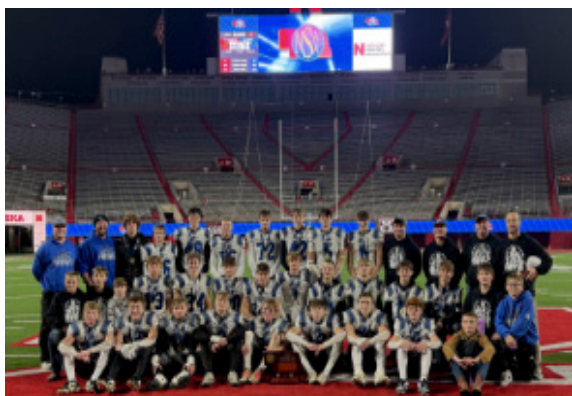
* **Morgan Harms of Broken Bow was presented the 2025 NFHS Outstanding High School Music Educator Award.**

* **Southwest was the Class D6 State Football runner-up.**

* **Sandy Creek was the Class D1 State Football Champion. They are a repeat champion from last year. Crofton was the runner-up.**



* **Wynot won the Class D2 State Football Championship.**



* **Holdrege's Erin Heath is the 2025 NebPreps Volleyball Awards Coach of the Year.**



* **Several students from NRCSA-member schools were honored by Governor Jim Pillen and Nebraska Commissioner of Education Brian Maher at the annual Commissioner's Recognition for Excellence in Nebraska Career and Technical Education ceremony in the State Capitol. Students were recognized for being national level officers in their organizations or placing at the organization's national conference. They include:**

- **EDUCATORS RISING:** Layryn Breitreutz (Centennial), Riley Hopkins (Bayard), Amy Albro (Bayard),

Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

Shayla Jacobsen (Plainview)

- **FBLA:** James Fletcher (Litchfield), Maria Adle (Chase County), Tara Buzek and Austin Schmidt (Heartland), Braxton Soll, Lucas Chappellear, Wyatt Flesner, Trent Koger (Arlington), August Burns and Joe Burns (Arlington), Mia Deras (Fairbury), Sarah Lange (Raymond Central), Georgia Ramsey and Heidi Taylor (Wayne State College), Braxton Dalton (Wayne State College), Mekenna Fisher (Chadron State College), Lander Imbimbo (Peru State College)
- **FCCLA:** Jaiden Ertzner, Alaina Rogat, Presley Wolf (Battle Creek), MaHaylee Dotson-Monroe (Cross County), Clara Preister (Twin River), Lynn Miner (O'Neill), Brittin Fink and Madisyn White (Medicine Valley), Clare Holoubek and Chloe Indra (Clarkson), Layla Borowiak and Lausyn Matthes (Twin River), Zuri Booth and Brylee Ramaekers (Twin River), Jazy York (O'Neill), Addilyn Doke (Ainsworth), Quinn Ross (Elmwood Murdock), Jailyn Romesser (O'Neill), Aracely Negrete and Lillie Shoemaker (Ord), Mary Licking and Emerson Pettit (Thedford), Gracen Eckert (Boyd County), Charlotte Welsh (O'Neill), Brooklyn Eckert (Boyd County), Cheney Dishman, Angel Johnson, Kaygan Witthuhn (Callaway), Kiarra Kennedy (O'Neill), Klayton Rinne (Dundy County-Stratton)
- **FFA:** Claire Woeppel (Chambers, now at UNL), Reece Steiner (Elm Creek), Katelyn Melvin (Johnson-Brock), Ashley Beethe and Catherine Wendt (Johnson County Central), Craig Anthony (Johnson-Brock), Elizabeth Olson and Ansley Cadwallader (West Holt), Molly Weber and Saige Rother (Johnson County Central), Erika Donahue, Kiarra Eppenbach, Marissa Tvrdy, Carlee Wolfe (Raymond Central), Carson Reiman (Gothenburg), Mason Dutro, Toby Orvis, Parker Walahoski, Paige Walahoski (Overton), Bela Jedlicka, Abigail Reyna, Addison Vavricek, Allison Vavricek (Schuyler), Cora Hoffschneider (Centennial), Sam Wells (St. Paul)
- **HOSA:** Emma Baldeh (Dundy County-Stratton)
- **SKILLS USA:** Roger Meraz (Wayne State College), Levi Vaughan (Central City), Jackson Nordhues, Joe Grone, Brett Staab (Wayne State College), Delainey Mumm (Thayer Central), Hailey Hoffman, John Mann (Wayne State College)



O'NEILL FCCLA



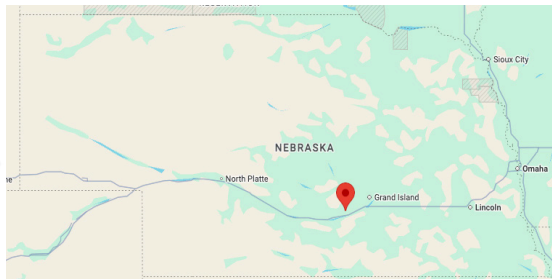
*ASHLEY BEETHE, CATHERINE WENDT, MOLLY WEBER,
SAIGE ROTHER OF JOHNSON COUNTY CENTRAL*



LEVI VAUGHN, CENTRAL CITY

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Shelton Public Schools



Mascot: Bulldogs

Enrollment: 280 students

Location(s): Shelton, NE

Superintendent: **Rodney Engel**



Principal(s): **Jeff Kenton**, Elementary & **Amy Hostetler**, High School

Board of Education: *Shelton Public Schools Board Members (Left to right):* Back row - **Levi Rogers, Chuck Wiese, Dana Tompkin** Front row- President **Kay Johnson**, Secretary **Emmy Power**, Vice President **Lisa Stewart**



Programs:

FFA:

The Shelton FFA Chapter is an important part of the academic strength of Shelton Public Schools. Chartered in 2016, the chapter has had its share of accomplishments in the past ten years. The FFA Chapter proudly boasts 40-50 members each year in grades 7-12, with membership hitting its highest number yet in 2025 with 56 members. 46% of eligible students in the high school are FFA members, and 56% of the 7-12 student body is enrolled in an agriculture education class!

Many are surprised to learn that Shelton hasn't always had an agriculture program, being that it is a rural community. Shelton had an ag program and an FFA chapter in the 60s, but it was discontinued and replaced with industrial technology. When the industrial technology teacher departed in 2016, the administration and school board saw it as the perfect opportunity to revive the program. The program has grown, not only in the number of students, but also in the variety of courses offered and other opportunities. In 2019, with the help of the Shelton FFA Booster Group and other local donors, the school was able to build a large outdoor greenhouse, which is utilized by the agriculture program and FFA chapter for hands-on learning opportunities all year long! The agriculture program offers courses in animal science, veterinary science, agronomy, floriculture, landscaping, agribusiness, ag sales, and welding!

Students in the FFA chapter have been able to learn about the agriculture industry through these courses, FFA competitions, and their Supervised Agriculture Experiences (SAE), which take place outside of the classroom. Students in Shelton have a diverse range of SAE projects, from working for local producers to managing their own livestock, crops, or produce. The community and school are proud of the many accomplishments the chapter has garnered in the past ten years, including a State Champion Livestock Management CDE Team in 2022 and producing an FFA State Officer in 2022! The chapter has been honored at the Nebraska FFA Convention for awards in Livestock Evaluation, Meat Evaluation, Livestock Management, Veterinary Science, Dairy Cattle Evaluation, Proficiency Award Finalists, State Star Farmer Finalists, and over 20 State Degree Recipients. In the past four years, the chapter has had six American FFA Degree Recipients, and is looking to increase that number in the future!

In 2023, Miss Horak was awarded the Nebraska Farm Bureau Agriculture Educator of the Year! She was the advisor who first chartered the program in 2016 and continues to be at the forefront of its success.

Volleyball:

The Shelton Volleyball team has built an impressive legacy over the past four seasons, earning four consecutive trips to the Nebraska State Tournament and showcasing the program's growth, resilience, and competitive excellence. Their run began with a standout 3rd place finish in 2022, followed by another strong performance as State Qualifiers in 2023. The team reached a historic milestone in 2024, capturing the D-2 State Championship and bringing home the program's first state title. In 2025, the Bulldogs moved up a class and still delivered a remarkable season, finishing 4th at State.

FFA:



Volleyball:



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Elba Public Schools



Mascot: Bluejays

Enrollment: 108 students

Location(s): Elba, NE

Interesting Fact Something that immediately sets Elba Public Schools apart is our mascot: the Purple Bluejay. Over the years, I've noticed that people around the state are often puzzled by why our Bluejays are purple. Curious, I asked around and heard several interesting theories and stories from longtime community members and alumni—but no one seemed to know the real answer, just rumors passed down over time. While I may not know the full history, here is my take on why we are the Purple Bluejays.

Elba Public Schools' mascot, the Purple Bluejay, is more than just a symbol—it represents the spirit and pride of our school community. Bluejays are known for their intelligence, energy, and strong sense of community, qualities we want our students to embody every day. The purple color makes our Bluejay unique and bold, standing out just like our students do in academics, athletics, and the arts. Whether on the court, the stage, or in the classroom, the Purple Bluejay reminds everyone at Elba to work hard, support each other, and take pride in being part of something bigger.

Superintendent: Bobby Kelley

Principal: Tim Potter

Board of Education: Left to Right: Robyn Rasmussen (Secretary), Travis Frederick, Ryan Rasmussen, Terry Spilinek (President), Jim Thompson (Vice President), Brittany Christensen (Treasurer)



Programs:

Elba Public Schools House Program

The House Program at Elba Public Schools is built around the idea that students thrive when they feel connected, supported, and part of a team. Every student and staff member belongs to one of our character-based houses, and those houses stay with them throughout their time at Elba. Each house focuses on a core trait we want our students to grow in, and the goal is to create smaller “families” across the building where older students mentor younger ones, everyone has a sense of belonging, and positive behavior is consistently reinforced.

For example, Respect House focuses on what it means to treat others well, listen, communicate, and show appreciation for our school and community. Students in this house often lead by example—modeling how to handle disagreements, how to work with others, and how to take pride in their actions. Other houses follow the same idea, each highlighting a different character strength such as Responsibility, Integrity, Leadership, Service, or Perseverance (adjust these to match your actual house names if needed). Students earn points for their houses through positive behavior, participation, academics, and showing those character traits in action.

Throughout the year, we hold House competitions, group activities, and service projects. These events give students a chance to work as a team while building relationships across grade levels. Over time, the houses have created a stronger school culture—students look out for each other, celebrate each other’s wins, and take real pride in the house they represent. It’s been a powerful way to grow character and community at the same time.

Elba Athletics and Fine Arts Programs

At Elba Public Schools, our athletic and fine arts programs are thriving and giving students countless ways to grow. Our athletes compete in basketball, volleyball, track, and more, learning teamwork, leadership, and perseverance every step of the way. Meanwhile, our fine arts programs—like one-act, band, and choir—allow students to explore their creativity, build confidence, and shine in front of the community. Together, these programs help students discover their talents, work hard, and take pride in their accomplishments.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Tri-County Public Schools



Mascot: Trojans

Enrollment: 435 students

Location(s): DeWitt, NE

Interesting Fact: Tri County Public Schools cover approximately 270 square miles.

Superintendent: Brian Rottinghaus

Principal(s): Ryan Clark, Secondary Principal; Jesse Gronemeyer, Elementary Principal; Caleb Armstrong, AD & Assistant Principal

Board of Education:

Brian Quackenbush, Brian Scherling, Annette Weise, Derrick Damrow, Dustin Gronemeyer & Tom Koch



Programs:

Tri County has become a major partner in the Southeast Community College Career Academy Partnership (SENCAP) welding program. Through our partnership with this program, students are able to graduate high school with certification and welding. Over the past eight years, an average of 19 students each year have participated in the program. Over that time frame, a total of 53 have received dual-credit certificates in welding through SENCAP.



Tri County has been a leader in its music program. Over the past two decades, Tri County has received the Best Community for Music designation by The National Association of Music Merchants 13 times. That is more than any other school in Nebraska and among the top 167 school districts nationwide. These designations are given to districts demonstrating an exceptionally-high commitment to music education acquisition.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Ponca Public Schools



Mascot: Indians

Enrollment: 447 students

Locations: 3-12 Campus in Ponca, PK-2 Campus in Jackson

Interesting Fact: Ponca High School has won an incredible seven NCA Sportsmanship Award trophies from various state tournaments in recent years. This reflects not only how our athletes compete and our school community supports them, but also how our kids demonstrate leadership, respect, resilience, and class on the biggest stages.

Superintendent: Brendan Calahan



Principal(s): Allison Stansberry (7-12), John Stroud (PK-6)

Board of Education: Front Row (L-R): **Casey McGhee** (Vice President), **Phil Kramper**, **Christina Luebe**. Back Row (L-R): **Richard Dohma** (President), **Jerod Davis**, **Julie Schamp**



Buddy Program: Our 7th Grade Buddy Program pairs incoming junior high students with dedicated upperclassmen who help guide their transition into Ponca High School. These student mentors serve as positive role models, offering support, encouragement, and practical guidance as 7th graders navigate new routines, expectations, and opportunities. Through regular check-ins, group activities, and a focus on building strong relationships, the program helps younger students feel welcomed, confident, and connected from day one. This mentorship model not only eases the transition to high school but also strengthens our school community by empowering older students to lead with empathy and purpose.



Student Leadership Team: The Student Leadership Team is a flagship opportunity for Ponca High School students to step into meaningful leadership and make a real impact on school culture and the broader community. Through this program, students collaborate to strengthen school pride, promote positive relationships, and lead initiatives that bring people together. Members take on projects that support a welcoming, inclusive environment and serve as ambassadors of our district's values both inside the school and out in the community. By applying their voices, creativity, and service-minded approach, Student Leadership Team members help shape the experiences of their peers and leave a lasting mark on not just our school, but the community as a whole.



2026 NRCSA Legislative Forum

The 2026 NRCSA Legislative Forum will be held on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln.

This year's program will feature remarks by many educational policy leaders.

There will again be the opportunity to discuss issues of local interest with senators over lunch. This provides an invaluable opportunity to network and discuss issues with your senator.

Be sure and make plans to attend!!

Room Reservations

There are rooms available at the Cornhusker Hotel at a discounted rate of \$119.00 per night for Wednesday February 25, 2026. The Cornhusker is a Marriott Hotel; they have instructed customers to use the central reservation line or the link below to reserve a room.

*Cornhusker Marriott Hotel: 1-866-706-7706

The deadline to reserve from NRCSA's room block is **February 5, 2026**

Program Highlights

Thursday February 26, 2026

8:20 A.M. - Welcome & Announcements

8:30 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

9:00 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

9:30 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

10:00 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

10:30 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

11:00 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

11:30 A.M. - Committee Chair or Rural Senator

12:00 P.M. - Lunch with Senators

1:10 P.M. - Jack Moles & Russ Westerhold;
NRCSA Executive Director & Lobbyist

1:45 P.M. - Closing & Adjourn

Please note: The schedule is subject to change.

2026 NRCSA Spring Conference

The 2026 NRCSA Spring Conference will be held on March 18 to 20, 2026, at the Crowne Plaza and Younes North Convention Center in Kearney.

There will be many informative and timely sessions regarding law, TEEOSA, school finance, curriculum development, updates from the Department of Ed, staff and board development, updates regarding current federal and state legislation and others. Sessions highlighting special programs and initiatives are always a plus. A total of 35 sessions will be provided at the conference. As always, the general sessions will feature music groups, speakers on Thursday and Friday, scholarships, awards, recognitions, and the traditional meals that have become a mainstay of the conference.

As usual, there will be many opportunities for networking and informal discussions with attendees from other schools!

Be sure and make plans to attend!!

Room Reservations

There are several hotels in and around the area. Attendees will need to make room arrangements for the conference.

These hotels participate in group rates for Spring Conference

Crowne Plaza (308) 238-7000
Hampton Inn (308) 234-3400

These hotels do NOT participate in group rates

Holiday Inn (308) 237-5971
Comfort Inn & Suites (308) 236-3400
La Quinta Inn & Suites (308) 237-4400
America Inn & Suites (308) 234-7800
Fairfield Inn (308) 236-4200
Holiday Inn Express (308) 234-8100
Microtel Inn & Suites (308) 698-3003
New Victorian Inn & Suites (308) 237-5858
Wingate Inn (308) 237-4400

Program Highlights

Wednesday March 18, 2026

10:00 AM Pre-Conference: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

Presented by:



6:30 PM Exhibitor Check-In and Set-Up

7:00 PM Early Registration and Hospitality Rooms Open

Thursday March 19, 2026

7:15 AM Registration & Exhibit Hall Open

8:00 AM General Session

11:00 AM – 11:50 AM Select-a-Session I

12:00 PM General Session

2:20 PM - 3:10 PM Select-a-Session II

3:35 PM - 4:25 PM Select-a-Session III

6:00 PM Country Buffet

7:00 PM Hospitality Rooms Open

Friday March 20, 2026

7:30 AM Registration Open

8:00 AM - 8:50 AM Select-a-Session IV

9:00 AM – 9:50 AM Select-a-Session V

10:00 AM Brunch

10:50 AM Closing Session

12:50 PM Gifts, Prizes, & Giveaways

Updates from Members & Other Entities

From NRCSA Executive Director Jack Moles: *NRCSA is backing the work of the Nebraska State College System and the Nebraska SMART program. This is a unique approach to providing free tutoring services to your students. Information on the program is provided below. This program is beneficial on many levels. Among them are:*

- *The program is FREE for kids and families.*
- *The program provides valuable experience for prospective teachers.*
- *The program provides a paying job for prospective teachers.*
- *The program provides another great connection between Chadron State, Peru State, and Wayne State with NRCSA member school districts. All three of the State Colleges are NRCSA members.*
- *The program provides an opportunity to connect prospective teachers with rural schools. Some of the tutors did not attend rural high schools and this provides an opportunity for them to connect with rural.*
- *The program provides an opportunity to connect YOUR school with prospective teachers. You may be in the market to hire one of these tutors in the future and this connection could help!*



Nebraska SMART Update

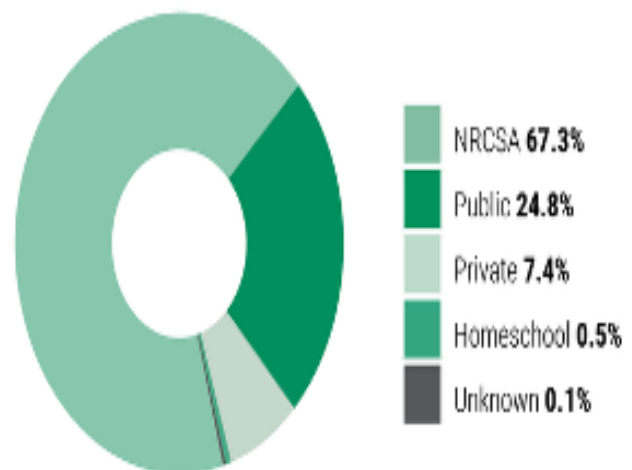
Free One-on-One Tutoring Now Available for All Nebraska Students

Nebraska SMART is helping students across the state reach their full academic potential through free, online tutoring available to all K–12 students. The program connects students with trained college tutors who provide personalized, one-on-one support in core subjects.

To date, Nebraska SMART tutors have completed more than **2,171** tutoring sessions, serving **868** students statewide. The program's success is possible thanks to strong partnerships with schools and organizations across Nebraska like NRCSA. These partnerships ensure that students, no matter where they live, have access to high-quality academic support.

868 STUDENTS SERVED

Since February 2024, 868 students have registered for free online tutoring with Nebraska SMART. The chart shows the distribution of students registered based on school type.

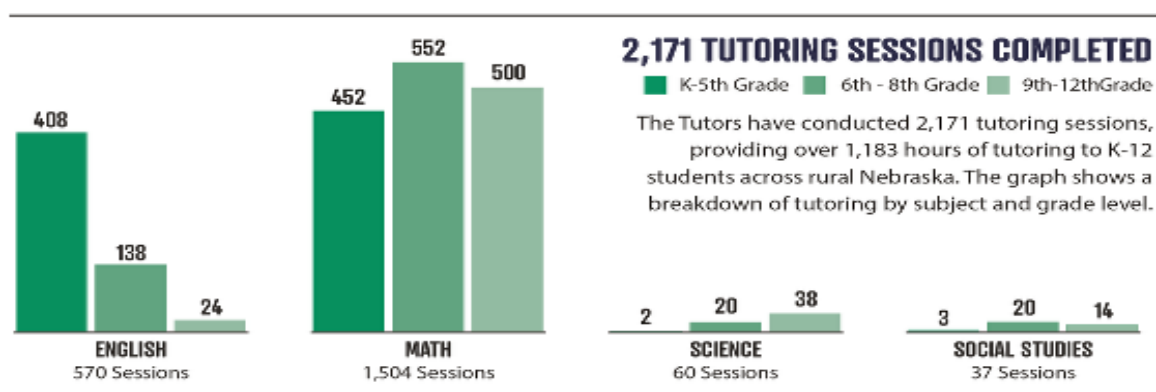


How to Access Tutoring

To access tutoring, parents need to register their student(s) through our website. After registering, parents and students can log in to schedule tutoring appointments or request on-demand tutoring with a Tutor. Students are encouraged to provide the homework or assignment for which they need help. Assignments can be uploaded to the secure classroom, sent to the Tutor in advance via message, or a picture can be taken of the assignment when connected to the Tutor in the classroom.

For NRCSA schools, Nebraska SMART offers a meaningful way to extend learning beyond the classroom without adding extra cost or staff burden. Teachers and school leaders are encouraged to share this opportunity with students and families and to remind them that free, one-on-one tutoring is just a click away. Please help promote this free service to your students and families by sharing our [flyer](#) (also available in [Spanish](#)).

Together, the Nebraska State Colleges, the Nebraska Department of Education, and NRCSA schools are making a statewide impact, helping every student build confidence, master challenging subjects, and stay on the path to success.



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To learn more or help your students get started, visit www.nscs.edu/nebraskasmart or contact Judi Yorges at jyorges@nscs.edu.

As we hear concern from rural districts concerning moves in the national front regarding the Department of Education, the National Rural Education Association (NREA) and the National Education Association (NEA) have combined to share a website outlining the amount of federal funding that goes to public schools. The website can be accessed here:

[How Much Funding Does My Public School Get from the Federal Government](#)

Dr. Steven Johnson, a member of the NREA Executive Committee, provided a document entitled, “Strengthening Rural Communities Through Public Education”. Many of you had an opportunity to meet Steve at the NRCSA Spring Conference. His article may be accessed here:

[Strengthening Rural Communities Through Public Education](#)

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, along with the Food Research and Action Center, has drawn attention to the possibility that the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) might be substantially altered. This change

could have a negative impact on several school districts in Nebraska. The following website provides a great overview of the concern and allows the viewer to go specifically to Nebraska to see how the change could affect districts.

[State by State Fact Sheet](#)

The ESUCC and ESU 3 have shared a document which outlines all of the trainings and mandates that are required of districts. The document, “School District Plans, Policies, and Annual Trainings Requirements”, is a handy reminder for districts. Thanks to ESUCC Executive Director Kraig Lofquist and ESU 3 Administrator Dan Schnoes for developing and distributing this handy tool. The document may be accessed here:

[School District Plans, Policies, & Annual Trainings](#)

Jeremy Braden, Superintendent at Doniphan-Trumbull, has developed a useful agenda for onboarding new Board of Education members. Many of our districts will bring on new Board members in January. Jeremy’s instrument could be a nice template for Superintendents and Board Presidents to use in working with new Board members. It may be accessed here:

[Board Member Onboarding](#)

From Rebecca Vogt, UNL

Today we are releasing the first of the reports from the 2024 Rural Poll, focusing on the well-being of rural Nebraskans. The report can be accessed online. The press release for this report can be found here.

[Well Being of Rural Nebraskans](#)

From Jay Martin, NDE Director of School Safety & Security

Hello All,

Time for the home stretch to the end of another school year! I hope it all goes well with all the events planned this spring.

Below you will find the School Safety Newsletter and information. The main question to look for is a Threat Assessment Survey. We are gaging schools’ interest in future Threat Assessment trainings. The last page has a breakdown of the three Threat Assessment trainings offered by UNLPPC. Please take a moment to complete this survey by April 15, 2025.

Remember to apply for your Diamond status Safety Badge to display at your school letting your school community know you “Place School Safety First!”

Thanks for all you do in school safety.

[School Safety Newsletter Spring 2025](#)

UNL Extension Center: Embracing Innovation: Exploring the Dynamics of New Partnerships

Developing business & Industry, organizational, and postsecondary partnerships with school districts can play a pivotal role in enriching the educational experience, supporting student achievement, and strengthening

connections between schools and their communities. By leveraging external resources, expertise, and support, schools can create a more inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environment for all students. While partnerships within school districts can bring numerous benefits, there are also challenges that may be encountered. These can be overcome by fostering a culture of collaboration, prioritizing communication and relationship-building, seeking creative funding solutions, and promoting equity and inclusivity in partnership efforts. Additionally, leveraging support from district leadership, community stakeholders, and external resources can help schools overcome obstacles and maximize the benefits of collaborative partnerships.

We in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources (IANR), specifically the College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources (CASNR) and Nebraska Extension 4-H, believe this strategy for K-12 partnerships will result in a strong learning innovation network of support for every learner and every educator in the state of Nebraska. The world of higher education is evolving, driven by changes in technology, demographics, workforce demands, and societal expectations. To meet the needs of today's learners in the 21st century and prepare them for the challenges of tomorrow, we are embracing innovation, collaboration, and a student-centered approach.

In recent years, CASNR has created two new positions to help in this work. Dr. Tammy Mittelstet (tmittelstet@unl.edu) is serving as the CASNR Statewide Education and Career Pathways Coordinator and Bailey Feit (bailey.feit@unl.edu) serves as the LPS/CASNR Early College and Career Pathways Coordinator. They engage in co-creating education and career pathways for students and supporting teachers by:

- creating opportunities and minimizing barriers for all learners in the exploration of education and career pathways,
- investing in and supporting teachers to innovate and integrate cross-curricular concepts of Food, Energy, Water, and Societal Systems (FEWSS) throughout K-12 education,
- encouraging our higher education institutions to share content expertise to build curriculum that will inform best practices in the areas of FEWSS and mentor future systems thinkers for the continuum of learners through our higher education institutions,
- connecting and developing a team of community leaders to build partnerships that combine resources to support student and teacher innovation, and
- building a workforce of tomorrow with the support of the industry of today by developing work-based learning opportunities.

If you would like to get monthly updates, consider signing up for the L.I.N.K.S. newsletter at <https://casnr.unl.edu/k-12-partners>.

Nebraska Extension brings University of Nebraska expertise and research in 8 key areas of impact directly to Nebraskans from all walks of life in each of the state's 93 counties. Nebraskans turn to Nebraska Extension to strengthen their families, inspire their communities, empower young people, conserve and protect natural resources and advance their farms, ranches and businesses. Nebraska 4-H represents one of the eight key areas, and has been a leader in the career and college readiness field by being one of the first in the country to support a statewide educator position and team to provide leadership in program development and delivery.

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) is proud to release Why Rural Matters 2025—the 11th edition in a long-standing series of reports that examine the contexts and conditions of rural education across all 50 states. This report continues the critical mission of drawing attention to the urgent need for policymakers, educators, and communities to address rural education challenges and opportunities within their own states.

Since its inception, the Why Rural Matters series has sought to make publicly available data more accessible and actionable. The overarching goal remains clear: to promote informed, civil dialogue about our shared civic responsibility to ensure that every student—rural or urban—has access to high-quality educational opportunities.

New in this year's edition is the inclusion of Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools. In his topical essay, Alex

Red Corn provides critical insights into the significance of BIE schools, which educate students from multiple tribes and nations with unique histories and cultures. The report carefully distinguishes between “states” proper and BIE schools while underscoring their shared place in the broader rural education landscape. The analyses and data presented in Why Rural Matters 2025 are intended to inform policy discussions, guide decision-making, and inspire action. The report highlights states that have demonstrated measurable progress over time, highlighting examples where thoughtful policy interventions have led to improved outcomes for rural students. These stories of progress offer valuable lessons and serve as evidence that strategic, context-sensitive policies can make a tangible difference in the lives of rural learners.

Data used in Why Rural Matters 2025 come from public sources: the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the United States Department of Education, the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The National Rural Education Association is proud to launch the 2025 Why Rural Matters report, a project with a more than 20-year history of shaping the conversation about rural education. First conceptualized by the Rural Schools and Community Trust, the report has evolved into a vital resource for policymakers, educators, and communities. Today, NREA carries this important work forward, ensuring that the voices, needs, and strengths of rural schools and students remain at the forefront of education policy and practice nationwide. We are also grateful to the Rural Schools Collaborative, whose continued support strengthens NREA’s work on behalf of rural schools, educators, and students across the country.

I would encourage you to take a look at WHY RURAL MATTERS, which can be accessed here:

[Why Rural Matters 2025](#)

The National Rural Education Association (NREA) partnered with AASA in producing a report on REAP. REAP is a program that benefits many of our smaller districts. The report can be accessed here:

<https://www.aasa.org/docs/default-source/resources/reports/rural-education-achievement-program-survey-report.pdf>

[Understanding REAP](#)



The NCA & Proactive Coaching partner to bring Coach Bruce Brown's legendary insights about the parent's role in education-based athletics to your school & community.

Book your School's
Presentation

Parent Meetings
or Special Events

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN EDUCATION-BASED ATHLETICS

PRESENTED BY DARIN BOYSEN, NCA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"Outstanding information, well delivered. There were times I thought he was talking directly to me, which is a sign of a great communicator. I personally feel I'm better today than yesterday as a sports parent because I was able to listen to this message." – Parent & School Board Member



Before the Season

What do Athletes/Kids Really Want?

Releasing Your Son/Daughter to the Experience

Parental Red Flags

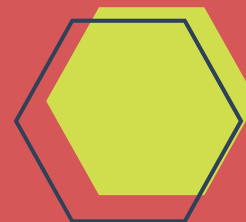


During the Game/Event

Modeling Appropriate Behavior

Big Picture

One Instructional Voice



After the Game/Event

Time & Space

Confidence Building

Relationship Building

Six Powerful Words

NEBRASKA COACHES ASSOCIATION

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402-310-5472 | darin@ncacoach.org

Official Association Endorsements as of September 1





Nebraska School Administrators & School Board Members,

The Nebraska Coaches Association (NCA) is excited to announce a partnership with Proactive Coaching to bring Coach Bruce Brown's legendary insights about **"The Role of Parents in Education-Based Athletics"** to your school and community. Please see the attached flyer for highlights/focus of the in-person presentation.

NCA Executive Director, Darin Boysen, will begin travel across Nebraska multiple times throughout the 2024-2025 school year to deliver this powerful and passionate message. The NCA, Proactive Coaching and Darin are partnering to bring this message to your school at a **50% discounted rate from the standard Proactive Coaching in-person booking fee.**

Presentation Details:

45-Minute Parent Presentation with One School or Combined Schools

- Single school presentations are recommended but not required
- One presentation = one fee (no additional fee for schools merging)

Audio/Visual Requirements from the Host School:

- Overhead Projector with HDMI Connection
- Screen or Scoreboard Display
- Microphone

Cost – Payable the Day of Presentation:

- Within 75 miles of Lincoln/150 miles Round Trip
 - \$750 flat rate
- Beyond 75 miles of Lincoln/150 miles Round Trip
 - \$750 flat rate
 - 50 Cents per mile Round-Trip -OR- Cost of a Rental Vehicle/Gas
 - In some cases, a rental car may be cheaper for longer distances
 - Hotel Expense – if needed
- ***Please Note:*** Working together with other area schools to book separately on consecutive days of the week can greatly save travel and lodging expenses

The following booklets authored by Bruce Brown will be available for purchase for \$5 each (15% discount) after the presentation or ordered by the school in advance:

- *The Role of Parents in Athletics*
- *Playing with Confidence*
- *Life Lessons for Athletes*

Please let us know if you have any questions regarding the presentation or booking a date.
All the best,

Darin Boysen

Darin Boysen
Nebraska Coaches Association

Official Association Endorsements – as of September 1



The National Rural Education Association, of which NRCSA is a member, works closely with the the Committee for Education Funding (CEF) on federal policy issues. Following is an update on education issues on the federal level from CEF:

I. Policy Intelligence and Education News

Department of Education's website is periodically offline – The Department of Education's (ED's) website (www.ed.gov) has been repeatedly offline today, with some of the career and technical education and adult education sites down since last night. I asked the education authorizing committee and Appropriations Committee staffers if this is related to the government shutdown and having no staff there to fix a technical problem or is this a statement of the Administration's intention to close ED; apparently it is an inadvertent technical issue. I wouldn't normally assume nefarious intentions, but this year has demonstrated that the Administration is working to dismantle ED from within. The website glitches serve to as a reminder that if there is information on the ED website that you regularly use, you should download it and save it elsewhere.

Judge extends order halting layoffs of federal employees during the shutdown – Yesterday a federal judge extended her original order that temporarily stopped the Administration from firing federal employees during the shutdown, which had included about 465 employees at ED. The Administration is now prohibited from making a reduction in force (RIF) during the government shutdown. So those employees given RIF notices in early October now likely have their jobs for the time being but most are furloughed and not being paid. See [CNBC article](#) for details.

Government shutdown continues – The government has been mostly shut down for more than four weeks now, with apparently no high-level talks about how to resolve the conflicts; the House has been in recess since mid-September. Proposals to pay specific groups of federal employees – those still working, or those at specific agencies – and to continue funding specific programs – such as SNAP benefits – have not passed the Senate. The impacts of the shutdown will be felt more widely this week as federal employees except for troops get no October paycheck, the Administration is not using a contingency fund to pay SNAP benefits on November 1 so 42 million beneficiaries will be without income for food, some federally supported programs that had been kept open this month with leftover funds will shut down, and Obamacare health care premiums for 2026 get posted that do not include a subsidy that

is expiring. These actions result from choices that Congress and the Administration are making. When there is a will to spend federal funds – for instance, for billions of dollars of tax breaks in Republicans' bill this summer, for an emergency response or financial bailout – or to cut funds – for instance, for student loans, for research, for SNAP benefits or Medicaid - Congress can pass legislation that spends more or cuts funding, or that provides a tax break or tax increase.

Fact sheets from House Appropriations Committee Republicans and Democrats – Yesterday both House Appropriations Committee Democrats and Republicans posted material that bolster their opposing positions:

Republican press release listing 300+ groups supporting the House-passed funding bill to reopen the government – The [press release](#) lists hundreds of organizations that support the House-passed bill, including many representing agricultural and business interests, the airline industry, chambers of commerce, veterans groups, and conservative interest organizations.

Democratic [fact sheet](#) about how Administration actions “make their shutdown more painful” – The Democratic fact sheet lists three ways that the Administration's actions are making the shutdown more painful for Americans: the mass layoffs announced in early October (now paused due to the District Court judge mentioned above, but I'd expect the Administration to appeal); executive orders to cancel funding to specific cities or state led by Democrats; and delaying or withholding funding for programs that have a source of funding available, like SNAP and some emergency assistance programs.

Three years ago, NRCSA began a Principal Search Service. This service is patterned after our successful Superintendent Search Service. Two options are available. Both options will involve NRCSA consultants recruiting candidates for the position. One option will involve the NRCSA consultant making background calls, while the reduced version of the service will place that role with the Superintendent. If you are interested in getting more information about the service now, please contact Jack. Here is a brochure outlining the service.

[NRCSA Principal Search Brochure](#)

Chadron State College Special Education Para-to-Teacher Program Initiative.

Purpose: This “Grow Your Own” Special Education Teacher program is designed to provide school districts with the opportunity to cultivate and participate in the training of their para-professionals who wish to continue their education to become special education teachers.

Who: Any individual who holds a minimum of an Associate’s Degree (or equivalent credit hours) from an accredited higher education institution, and who is employed as a para-professional within a school district. **What:** Chadron State will provide required course work and enrichment activities via online, face-to-face (via Zoom), and on the job experiential learning, leading to a Bachelor’s in Education Degree, and a Nebraska Teaching Certificate with an endorsement in Special Education (grades PK-12). With administrator input, program course work will be tailored to best fit your district practices and expectations. Each course will be offered in an 8-week format, with 12-13 credit hours to be completed each 16 week semester.

How: Program participants will be advised, monitored, and supported by CSC faculty/staff, and a CSC Education Program liaison is specifically assigned to facilitate their progress. District para-professionals may enter the program at any time in the academic year.

When: once participants reach their senior academic year they will embark on completing their capstone course work, via online and Zoom class sessions. This course work has been pared down considerably with the understanding and assumption that these student teachers will be learning “on-the-job”. For example, one section covers classroom management practices. Clearly, one can argue and attest that these student teacher interns are learning more about managing a classroom from being mentored by veteran teachers within your school, and observing them in action. This is the belief and learning approach embraced during this senior year. However, to ensure and assess concept learning, Chadron State faculty will be meeting with your student teacher cohort twice per week for 1.5 hours, via Zoom conferencing technology.

Graduation: At the completion of this program students/candidates graduate from Chadron State College, and apply for teaching licensure resulting in a valid initial teaching certificate with and endorsement in PK-12 Special Education. Chadron State’s education program is nationally and State accredited. As such, interstate certification reciprocity is not a problem.

Things for your consideration:

1) To qualify for this program participants must hold at least an Associate’s Degree or the equivalent in college credit hours. *(CSC will work with those applicants to provide them with the needed coursework leading up to program entry).*

2) Districts must agree to maintain para-professional employment throughout the course of the program—including during the student teaching experience.

Please contact Dr. Adam Fette for more program information, at afette@csc.edu.

The UNL Department of Educational Psychology has received a grant from the Swanson Foundation which allows them to offer mental health services to rural schools.

From Dr. Michael Scheel, Chair of the UNL Department of Educational Psychology:

The UNL Department of Educational Psychology would like to offer counseling and psychological services, as well as consultation services to the schools and communities of Southeast Nebraska. We run a mental health counseling and therapy clinic and we are offering counseling and consultation services to teachers, administrators, students, and community members of Southeast Nebraska. Services will be provided through remote and confidential means (i.e., Zoom conferencing). We are hoping that schools, families, and individuals contact us to schedule an appointment for a telehealth counseling or consultation session.

We have recently learned that a donor will support our work with individuals living in rural Southeast NE by paying all fees for services. Thus, whoever seeks out our services will simply have to indicate they live in Southeast Nebraska, and any services we provide will be paid for through the UNL Foundation. Individual, couple, and family counseling will be provided without financial expense. Additionally, we can provide teachers, school administrators, school counselors, and school social workers consultation services for students of their schools without charge.

We are very excited to enter a partnership with schools and communities of SE Nebraska to promote mental health and well-being. We are aware of the mental health counseling disparities that exist in Nebraska

rural areas, and our department, our College of Education and Human Sciences, and UNL are highly interested in offering our expertise and resources with the goal of enhancing the well-being of SE Nebraska individuals, schools, and communities. We are a group comprised of licensed psychologists and psychology graduate students who regularly provide services through our clinic to the Lincoln community. We are seeking to reach beyond Lincoln to connect more with surrounding rural areas. We also are acutely aware of the importance of addressing mental health concerns right now as we all are experiencing the stress of going through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Counseling and School Psychology Clinic is a training clinic in which graduate students in counseling and school psychology work with clients under the supervision of licensed psychologists. Services are available to all on a sliding scale. For clients from SE Nebraska communities, services will be paid for through UNL Foundation funds supplied by a donor who cares deeply about the welfare of schools and communities in SE Nebraska. Counseling services are offered to improve well-being, improve academic and behavioral issues, stabilize mood, manage stress, and improve life-adjustment issues.

For more information, please visit our clinic website:

<https://cehs.unl.edu/edpsych/clinic/>

A common theme from some of the decision makers on the state level is that “out of control” local spending is to blame for the property tax problem. NRCSA, along with many other educational entities, maintains that we do not have a school spending issue, but instead have a school funding issue. Attached are two reports, one from NRCSA, the other from Open Sky, that discuss the myth of “out of control” school spending. It is my hope that administrators and Board of Education members will read, then use these reports to counter those claims. When you do please tell your district’s story as that is the most powerful way to get this message across.

[NRCSA Spending Study](#)

[A Look at School Spending in NE from Open Sky](#)

NRCSA developed a corporate sponsorship/partnership program. The program is designed to provide our corporate partners with more opportunities for contact with the decision makers in our member school districts, ESUs, and the colleges through increased exposure. Corporate partners are able to choose among three levels of sponsorship: Purple Ribbon Partners, Blue Ribbon Friends, and Red Ribbon Sponsors. Different forms of contact with our members are made available in each of the three levels.

We are very pleased to partner with our corporate sponsors, and NRCSA is so very thankful that each of you has chosen to partner with us.



Rural school districts across Nebraska continue to balance the challenge of delivering high-quality education with the realities of aging buildings, evolving programs, and limited staffing resources. Even with strong maintenance teams in place, the ongoing demands of facility care, long-term planning and compliance requirements can place a significant strain on district capacity. At Wilkins ADP, we understand that every building decision a district makes, whether small repairs or major capital improvements, impacts students, staff, and the community for years to come. Our team partners closely with rural districts to develop clear and practical strategies rooted in both current facility conditions and long-range goals. A key component of these strategies is helping districts navigate funding and financing options for their facility projects. Our team has extensive experience guiding districts through successful bond efforts and helping communities understand the facility needs behind those initiatives. At the same time, we recognize that passing a bond has become far more challenging in today's environment. Because of this, we also help districts explore alternate financing options that may be available to schools such as QCPUF (Qualified Capital Purpose Undertaking Fund) and Lease-Purchase for certain types and sizes of projects, ensuring each district can find the most practical path forward for their needs.

Careful facility planning is an essential step in making these funding decisions effective. By understanding the condition, use, and long-term needs of their facilities, districts can align projects with available resources and prioritize investments that deliver the greatest impact. A customized facility planning process goes beyond identifying deficiencies and considers how educational programs are changing, how each building supports student learning, and what investments will provide the greatest long-term value. Our architects and consulting engineers work side by side with district leaders to evaluate buildings, discuss growth or decline trends and map out phased and budget-conscious solutions. We regularly assist districts with understanding the life cycle of building systems, estimating replacement timelines, evaluating instructional spaces for flexibility and safety, identifying opportunities to improve energy performance, exploring renovation and addition scenarios, and preparing clear planning documents that support future decision-making.

Thoughtful facility planning does not have to be overwhelming or expensive. With the right guidance, districts can confidently prioritize projects, extend the life of their buildings, and make the most of their available resources. Wilkins ADP remains committed to supporting rural schools throughout Nebraska as they navigate both daily facility needs and long-term planning efforts. To learn more about how we can assist your district, visit wilkinsadp.com or call us at **(308) 237-5787**.



Purple Ribbon Partners



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