



Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

Member Update

October 9, 2025



Photo Credit: Arapahoe Holbrook Public Schools



www.nrcsa.net



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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

9:00 AM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)

NRCSA Scholarship & Recognition Committee

10:00 AM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)

NRCSA Closing the Achievement Gap Research Team

11:00 AM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)

NRCSA Leaders Lunch

12:00 PM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)

NRCSA Legislative Committee

1:00 PM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)

NRCSA Rural Teacher Committee

3:00 PM November 19, 2025

At the CHI Center in Omaha (room TBD)



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

[Notice of Vacancy](#)

[Apply for this Vacancy](#)

Application Deadline: **Oct. 29, 2025**

Finalists Selected: **Nov. 10, 2025**

Interviews: **Nov. 15, 2025**

Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Bancroft-Rosalie Community Schools

[Notice of Vacancy](#)

[Apply for this Vacancy](#)

Application Deadline: **Nov. 3, 2025**

Finalists Selected: **Nov. 17, 2025**

Interviews: **Dec. 6, 2025**

Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Hampton Public Schools

Search starting soon!



Hayes Center Public Schools

[Notice of Vacancy](#)

[Apply for this Vacancy](#)

Application Deadline: **Oct. 13, 2025**

Finalists Selected: **Oct. 22, 2025**

Interviews: **Oct. 27, 2025**

Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**



Potter-Dix Public Schools

[Notice of Vacancy](#)

[Apply for this Vacancy](#)

Application Deadline: **Oct. 9, 2025**

Finalists Selected: **Oct. 13, 2025**

Interviews: **Oct. 30, 2025**

Contract Starts: **July 1, 2026**

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

Login: member Password: learning

NRCSA Updates

The six NRCSA district meetings are now in the book. Thanks to all who attended. This is one of my favorite times of the year as I get out into the state to see many of you. I also try to work in stops to schools and hit a few Board of Education meetings. I also thank the District Representatives to the Executive Committee for helping set up each of the district meetings: Jon Davis (Alma), Jane Davis (Hershey), Ginger Meyer (Chadron), Dale Hafer (Ainsworth), Daryl Schrunk (Randolph) and Andy Havelka (Freeman).

This year I was also able to visit the three State Colleges. While at Chadron, Peru, and Wayne, I was able to visit with the Presidents and representatives of the Education departments.



CHADRON STATE INTERIM PRESIDENT DR. JODI KUPPER



WAYNE STATE PRESIDENT MARYSZ RAMES

NRCSA Leadership

Chris Kunch, 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



PERU STATE INTERIM PRESIDENT WENDY WAUGH

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 is currently helping the Axtell, Hayes Center, Potter-Dix, Hampton, and Bancroft-Rosalie Boards of Education with their searches.

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 Cuning, 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@nrcca.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](#)

Our annual membership drive is coming to a close soon. Last year we had 224 school districts, ESU's, and State colleges and we hope to continue our annual growth. As of this writing, we are still waiting on a few members to renew. They have indicated that they are doing so, though. We also have a few non-members who are considering joining. Thanks to you for being a member. This energizes our representation and advocacy for rural Nebraska, no matter who we are engaged with on education, legislation, or community issues. Without your support, there is less rural advocacy. Whether we like it or not, the outstate and rural population does not

create a legislative majority anymore. In fact, rural Nebraska lost another seat in the Unicameral in the most recent redistricting. Finding success, whether that be by passing, amending, or stopping legislation, comes from membership, relationships, and focus. Thanks to your membership in NRCSA, rural is “at the table” and making a difference on behalf of our rural students, schools, and communities.

The School Financing Review Commission, which was created this Spring by the Unicameral, had its first meeting on Tuesday, August 12. Information on the meeting can be found in the following communication from NDE. The next meeting is set for Friday, October 31, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Nebraska Department of Education.. This is a public meeting, which can be attended by anyone. All meeting materials that are shared during the meeting will also be uploaded after the gathering for those who are interested in reviewing them.

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>

NRCSA is excited to introduce 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.

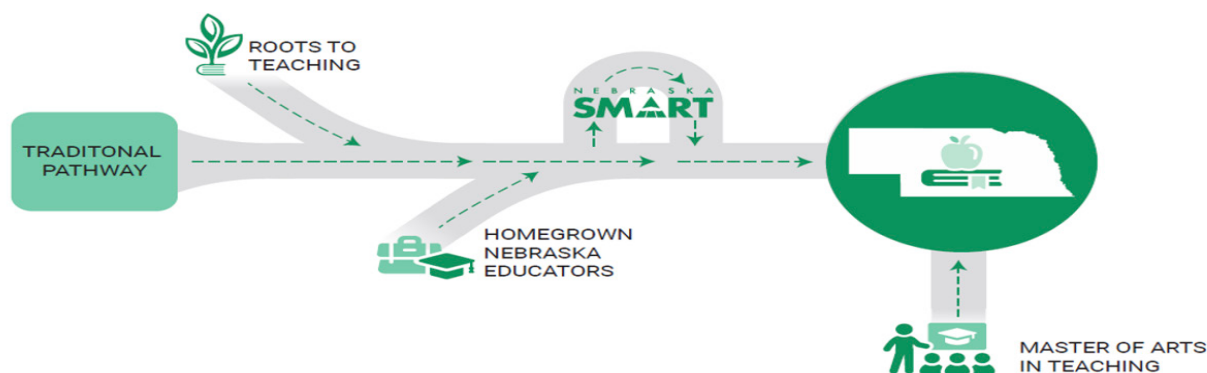
Recently, Minden Superintendent Jim Widdifield contacted the NRCSA office to see if we could be in assistance in helping him conduct a survey concerning Early Childhood programs in our rural schools. We assisted him with dissemination of the survey and he recently shared results.

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.

Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association

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 2026 Spring semester scholarships will be open in the fall, at a date to be determined.

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@nrca.net) or Jeff Bundy (jbundy@nrca.net).

U.S. Bank will provide 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. Of special interest is a new feature which allows the district to load a virtual purchase card on an employee's smartphone. This would be in lieu of the employee actually having a purchase card. This appears to be a very appealing feature of the program. The webinars are scheduled for:

Tuesday, Oct. 21 at 10:00 a.m.

Thursday, Oct. 30 at 2:00 p.m.

Reminders will be sent out closer to those dates.

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 136 such meetings. I most recently attended the Board meetings at Sandhills and Mullen on September 8, as well as Thedford and Stapleton on September 15.

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

Monday, October 20: Central City

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.

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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.



SANDHILLS BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



MULLEN BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



THEDFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



STAPLETON 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.

October 2025:

*** Sarah Hardin, a high school science teacher at Mullen, was named the Nebraska Teacher of the Year. She received her award in a surprise ceremony in Mullen by Commissioner Brian Maher.**



*** Ord FFA instructor, Dave Ference, was honored as the Nebraska State Fair's Parade Grand Marshal on FFA Weekend at the Fair. Dave was selected in honor of his nearly four decades of teaching and mentoring students at Ord High School.**



*** West Point Elementary School is one of only seven schools in Nebraska to be recognized as a Solution Tree Model PLC at Work School.**

*** The Nebraska Department of Education and the Nebraska Seal of Biliteracy Advisory Committee recently announced that 122 Seals of Biliteracy have been awarded to 118 Nebraska students in August of 2025. These prestigious awards recognize high school students who have achieved a high level of proficiency in English and at least one other language. Students at NRCSA-member districts who were recognized include:**

- **Addyson Hinz**, Deshler (Spanish)
- **Alyssa Dobias**, West Holt (Spanish)
- **Anel Monasterio**, West Holt (Spanish)
- **Clay Sandman**, Boone Central (Spanish)
- **Danessa Buckles**, Deshler (Spanish)
- **Hannah Scribner**, David City (Spanish)
- **Kiersten Jensen**, Conestoga (Spanish)
- **Lathan Buesing**, Gothenburg (Spanish)
- **Madalyn Pistulka**, West Holt (Spanish)
- **Madysen Kramer**, West Holt (Spanish)
- **Monica Chavez**, West Holt (Spanish)
- **Reese Svoboda**, David City (Spanish)
- **Sundus Abdi**, Lexington (Somali Maxaa)
- **Taylor Peek**, West Holt (Spanish)

*** The National Merit Scholarship Corporation announced that 108 Nebraska high school students are semi-finalists for its scholarship program. Students from NRCSA-member districts who are semi-finalists are:**

- **Jack Hayes**, Auburn
- **Scott Bennett**, Aurora
- **Brett Mellies**, Aurora
- **Sofia Center**, Chadron
- **Rebecca Lempka**, Minden
- **Noel Onate**, Sidney

*** Sofia Alonzo-Hidalgo, a freshman at Diller-Odell, has been selected as the Nebraska representative to compete in the Spanish FFA Creed event at National FFA Convention this year.**



*** Sarah Lange, a student at Raymond Central, was one of only three Nebraska students and only 161 high school students nationwide, to be named a U.S. President Scholar. The program recognizes high school seniors for their accomplishments in academics, the arts, and career and technical education fields**

*** Heather Thompson, of Shelby-Rising City, was honored as the 2025 Distinguished Administrator Award winner in appreciation for her dedication and service to the Nebraska School Librarians Association.**



*** Courtney Polak, a teacher at Raymond Central, was recognized as a 2025 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program's Distinguished Teacher.**



*** Kari Schroeder, a teacher at Syracuse-Dunbar-Avoca and NRCSA's Outstanding Elementary Teacher for 2025, was a finalist for the National Rural Education Association's National Rural Teacher of the Year Award.**



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Diller-Odell Public Schools



Mascot: Griffins

Enrollment: 238 students

Location(s): PK-6 in Diller; 7-12 in Odell

Interesting Fact: Mike Meyerle is in his 14th year of being the schools Superintendent. He has spent his entire 36 year career at Diller or Diller-Odell Public Schools. He began as a Social Studies Teacher and Head Football coach in 1990. Over his career, he has also served as a PK-6 Principal, PK-12 Principal, Activities Director, assisted in coaching a variety of sports, and substitute bus driver. He is planning to retire at the end of the 2027 school year.



Superintendent: Mike Meyerle (with is wife Steph)



Principal(s): Dylan Hinrichs, PK-6; Matt Mezger, 7-12

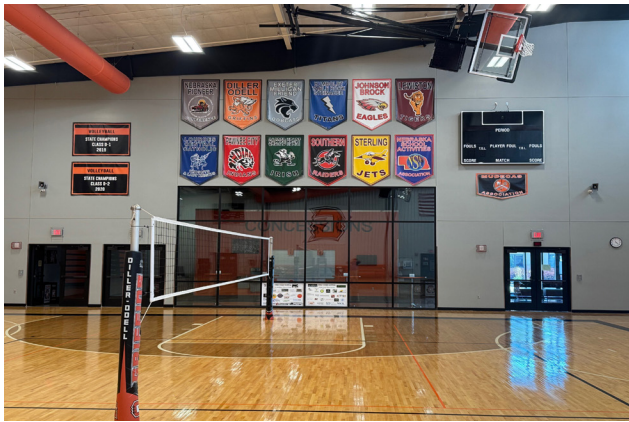


Board of Education (pictured left): Alissa Andersen, Josh Carpenter, Angie Clifford, Adam Engelman, Kasey Murphy, and Stuart Vitosh

Programs

Volleyball

Our volleyball team has been to the State Tournament nine out of the last 11 years. We won State Championships in 2019 and 2020.

FFA

Sofia Alonzo-Hidalgo, grade 9, has been selected as the Nebraska representative to compete in the Spanish FFA Creed event at National FFA Convention this year.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

West Holt Public Schools



Superintendent: Paul Pistulka

Principals: Cody Havranek, JR High/High School; Tracy Larson, Elementary

Mascots: Huskies

Enrollment: 424 students

Location(s): Atkinson, NE

Interesting Fact: West Holt Public Schools only serves the community of Atkinson and is not a consolidated school district. In the late 60's the rural and community schools came together to create West Holt Rural High School as a feeder for all the Class I rural schools in western Holt County. Through the process, Stuart remained separate and West Holt Rural High School came to be without Stuart, but the name stuck. Rather than Atkinson High School, the name of West Holt Rural High School remained as to represent all of the students, including the rural school students. After the closing of Class I schools in 2005, all the schools combined to make West Holt Public Schools as we are today. Several rural schools still operated for many years with the final school closing in 2020. Now all students are served at the PK-12 campus in Atkinson.

Board of Education:



Scott Gotschall, Susan Judge, Brenna Schaaf, Nick Konrad, Brian Mlady, Kelly Jelinek

Programs:

The Elementary Student Council is in its third year at West Holt! Every year we work to make the program better and add new items. Around 10-12 students in grades 4-6 are selected from a pool of students who filled out an application and gathered references. Throughout the school year, the student council helps with events like Red Ribbon Week, fundraising for specific items like playground equipment, Kindness Week, and service projects. Last year they made tie blankets to donate to our local nursing home. They are in charge of creating posters for social media and the hallways, as well as creating scripts that are read over the intercom during respective events. During lunch once a week, student council members meet to either organize upcoming events or focus on leadership qualities.



The West Holt Agriculture/FFA program is regarded as one of the leading Ag/FFA programs in the state. The program has consistently demonstrated excellence and dedication to the advancement of Agricultural Education which leads to success both in and out of the classroom. Currently, over 60% of West Holt JH/HS students are members of the FFA program and over 50% of last year's graduating Seniors received their State Degrees. Over the past three decades, the program has produced an impressive 63 State Champion teams and has recently produced a National Championship team at the FFA National Convention in Indianapolis. The involvement in our Ag/FFA programs by a majority of our students prompted the district to hire a 2nd Agricultural Teacher to help build and expand the program's offerings. Recently, our School Based Enterprises have thrived with businesses expanding and profits continuing to grow. These SBEs provide our students with valuable hands-on experiences in entrepreneurship and financial management. The West Holt Ag/FFA program looks to continue to build on the success both in and out of the classroom by developing invaluable life skills, leadership qualities, and a deep appreciation for agriculture.



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 Free Online Tutoring for K-12 Students.

Fall 2025 Tutoring Now Available

Nebraska SMART offers free, one-on-one online tutoring for K–12 students across the state. Parents and students can schedule tutoring sessions through their Nebraska SMART accounts, request on-demand help during tutoring hours, or set up recurring appointments by submitting the Recurrent Appointment Request Form.

Students are encouraged to bring assignments to each session. Homework can be uploaded directly to the secure classroom, sent in advance to the tutor, or shared by photo during the session.

Fall 2025 Tutoring Schedule:

Aug. 18 – Dec. 11, 2025

Monday–Thursday, 3:30–8:30 p.m. CT

Days tutoring are unavailable: October 13-14 and November 25 - 28

How Schools Can Help Promote Nebraska SMART

- Share program information in school, district, and classroom newsletters
- Highlight Nebraska SMART during Open House and Back-to-School events
- Follow and share Nebraska SMART on Facebook, Instagram, and X (Twitter)
- Post Nebraska SMART updates on school/district social media pages
- Add Nebraska SMART as a student resource on your district website
- Share information with teachers, counselors, and other staff
- Communicate with Parent/Teacher Associations
- Display posters in visible school locations (mailed in July)
- Provide your district technology team with the Nebraska SMART domain allowlist guide

Please note: Nebraska SMART tutoring is available only for K–12 students. Promotional materials should not be shared with Pre-K students.

Learn More

Website: www.nscs.edu/nebraskasmart

Email: nebraskasmart@nscs.edu

Social Media: [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X \(Twitter\)](#)

Thank you for helping us connect Nebraska students with the academic support they need to succeed.

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, in partnership with the Rural Schools Collaborative, has issued a study entitled WHY RURAL MATTERS. The report “looks critically at how educational supports and resources for student well-being are being distributed, casting light on which of our rural children are in need of additional support”. The study is well done and shows Nebraska in a pretty positive light. I would encourage you to take a look at WHY RURAL MATTERS, which can be accessed here:

Why Rural Matters

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



PROACTIVE
COACHING

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

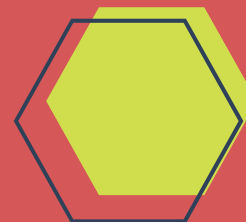


During the Game/Event

Modeling Appropriate Behavior

Big Picture

One Instructional Voice



After the Game/Event

Time & Space

Confidence Building

Relationship Building

Six Powerful Words

NEBRASKA COACHES ASSOCIATION

500 Charleston St, Ste 2, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

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's Legislative Committee (of which NRCSA is a member) continues to represent rural education on the Federal level. NRCSA Executive Director Jack Moles and NRCSA Legislative Committee Co-Chair Bryce Jorgenson (Supt. at Southern Valley) attended the NREA Federal Legislative Summit in Washington DC on April 6-8.



JACK MOLES AND BRYCE JORGENSEN AT THE U.S. CAPITOL



NRCSA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JACK MOLES & SOUTHERN VALLEY SUPT. BRYCE JORGENSEN WITH NEBRASKA SENATOR DEB FISCHER (1999 NRCSA Outstanding Board of Education Member)

Bryce and Jack met with the offices of each of Nebraska's contingency in Congress. They specifically shared three points of emphasis with them:

- Maintaining funding promises via programs such as REAP, Title I, and e-Rate in light of the changes being made to the US Department of Education.
- Full funding of IDEA was stressed. This would bring about \$171 million more to Nebraska public schools in support of Special Education services.
- Passage of the Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act of 2023. This would bring almost \$200,000 to school districts surrounded by tax-exempt public lands.

NREAs Legislative Agenda for 2025 is as follows:

One in five students attends a rural school. Rural schools provide education critical to future productive citizenship for children and youth in rural communities. Rural schools and higher education institutions play important roles beyond teaching and learning as the economic and social hearts of the communities they serve. America can thrive when rural communities thrive, and rural communities cannot succeed without strong preK-12 and postsecondary learning opportunities. As the oldest (1907) education association representing rural educators, the National Rural Education Association (NREA) supports education opportunities for students from early childhood through postsecondary education to include federal support for early childhood education, K-12 education, and a wide range of postsecondary education opportunities.

1. **RURAL SCHOOL FUNDING** • NREA urges Congress to sustain and, where possible, increase funding to Title V, Part B of ESSA, the Rural Education Achievement Program, with a specific increase to the Rural Low-Income School program. • NREA supports investments in the Secure Rural Schools Programs (SRS) that provides critical funding for districts impacted by federal lands. NREA supports long-term dedicated SRS funding for 5-10 years and retroactive appropriations to ensure no disruption in funding. • NREA requests that Congress fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To honor the commitment to support the education of students with disabilities, Congress should act immediately to restore full funding to IDEA. • NREA opposes efforts to privatize or redirect federal funds to privatize education such as voucher programs, attempts to incentivize federal tax credits for donations to private schools, and proposals to create educational savings accounts for K-12 students.
2. **RURAL EDUCATION DATA AND RESEARCH** • NREA expresses strong support for continuation of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). This will ensure collection and reporting of data about all schools including low-income and rural schools (including locale codes). NREA believes that accurate identification of rural schools is necessary to guide federal investments in rural schools and communities. • Data is essential to understand those practices that support rural students and advance rural education. • NREA supports continuing and increasing federal investment in data-driven rural education research.
3. **RURAL TEACHER EDUCATION AND**

WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS • NREA supports increased access and funding to career and technical education (CTE) programs in high school and post-secondary education to ensure a healthy rural workforce. • NREA supports the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the National Apprenticeship Act. WIOA increases the availability of services and supports in schools so students have access to youth apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs. • NREA supports the preservation and expansion of federal grant and loan forgiveness programs that support the preparation of teachers and other school personnel, especially those that encourage individuals to work in rural districts and communities.

The Committee for Education Funding (CEF) is a group that the NREA Legislative Committee works with.

Sarah Abernathy, CEF's Executive Director, provided an update following in November's elections. She does provide a decent overview of what the national landscape might look like moving forward. (Please note that all of CEF's views do not necessarily reflect all of the views of NREA or NRCSA.)

FROM SARAH:

I. The election and CEF's mission to support investments in education

Dear CEF Members:

As we digest the results of yesterday's election and wait to find out which party will lead the House in the 119th Congress, I imagine many of you are focused on what this means for governing in general and for education funding and policy in particular. We will certainly be facing a more challenging environment for investing in education and for ensuring that the federal government supports and protects students, educators, and education institutions as the country continues to educate students of all ages. CEF's mission to increase the federal investment in education will not change, but we'll have to focus more on defense against funding cuts. We will continue to point out the results of education investments – for students immediately and for economic growth in the long term. We will need to communicate well, broaden our community of advocates, and target our efforts so they are as effective as possible.

Things to keep in mind – I generally hope for the best but try to prepare for the worst. I wasn't prepared for last night, but just made a list of some things I expect from a Trump Administration's education agenda, and

how likely they are to happen. Key things to keep in mind:

Congress did not enact past Trump budgets that cut education funding – In fact, Congress ignored the Trump Administration's requested steep cuts and increased education funding. I don't expect education funding increases now but do know that Members of Congress do not want to vote for bills that will cost jobs in their district or harm their constituents. One of our jobs will be to continue to highlight why investments in education are so important to those who need to be convinced.

It is hard to make big changes in government quickly – Some Republicans want to eliminate the Department of Education, while continuing many programs at lower funding but in either the Department of Labor or in Health and Human Services. This type of change is hard to enact. There do appear to be some executive actions that would eliminate civil servant positions, and it's easy to shrink a government agency by not hiring behind staff who leave. If Republicans keep control of the House next Congress, they could use the budget reconciliation process to fast-track passage of tax cuts and cuts to entitlements, since reconciliation bills need only a majority in the Senate, not the customary 60-vote margin to pass.

Administrative/regulatory agendas change with each Administration – Since recent presidents have not been able to enact much of their agendas because they often split power with Congress, each successive administration has made changes with executive action, which are then reversed by the next administration. A Trump administration is likely to reverse Biden Administration student loan debt relief executive actions and impose new ones that support their agenda, such as limiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion requirements, limiting transgender student participation in sports or protections at the school level, and changes in interpretation of student civil rights protections.

Possible Republican policy agenda focused on the private sector (except for IHEs) – Conservative theory tends to support the private sector as a more efficient than the public sector for accomplishing goals, and I'd expect to see a renewed focus on support for private school vouchers that families could use toward private school education, more tax policy supporting private school tuition, and "local control" for public schools. At the higher education level, Republicans are likely to sharpen their attention to college admission

policies, protections for freedom of speech, policies regarding civil rights, and taxation of endowments. This can occur through appropriations and tax policy (forbidding federal funding if a recipient does a certain thing or requiring a certain action to receive federal funding), and through oversight hearings and federal administrative actions, among other actions.

What's next?

Changes in House and Senate party and committee leadership – We'll know more after all House races are called. The Washington Post has a handy list of the current Republican and Democratic seats most likely to change party, and ACG Advocacy is updating its own list of seats still to call, which I'll share. Meanwhile, I've attached a document that ACG prepared on Friday showing who is in line to head each Senate and House committee for each party depending upon who is in the majority, and who is in line for party leadership positions. Republicans plan to hold leadership elections next week, although the House could push its schedule back depending on what is known about all the remaining elections still to be called.

FY 2025 appropriations likely not finalized in December – The government is operating on an extension of fiscal year (FY) 2024 funding that expires on December 20. I think it is now likely that Congress will not finalize FY 2025 appropriations bills by then and will instead extend funding into next Spring (this is what House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) supported when the current 3-month extension was enacted in September), giving the new Republican Administration and Senate more say in the outcome. That outcome does not bode well for investments in education; the current bipartisan appropriations bill approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee includes \$12 billion more for the Department of Education programs than the Republican bill approved by the House Appropriations Committee.

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.



From ECE to CTE: Designing Learning Spaces for Early Childhood through Career and Technical Education

Clark & Enersen

While the subject matter and teaching methods evolve throughout a person's educational journey, a primary goal of schools remains constant: to foster learning and discovery, ultimately preparing students for future success. Clark & Enersen has 79 years of experience designing learning spaces for PK-12 through post-secondary and beyond, with a special focus on early childhood education (ECE) and career and technical education (CTE). These often serve as bookends for students on their educational journey and are vital for educational and career growth.

Early Childhood Education

With each ECE project, our team leverages their knowledge and experience designing numerous similar facilities, with consideration toward creating spaces that foster learning and discovery. Examples of interactive learning elements include placing windows at child eye level for connection to nature; incorporating magnetic and writeable surfaces in engaging places; incorporating shapes, numbers, letters, and primary colors into wall graphics and flooring; and other design elements that encourage large motor skill development. We believe educational opportunities can and should be expanded beyond the classroom, immersing students in a world of learning.

For Heartland Community Schools in Henderson, Neb., the Clark & Enersen team provided pre-bond services to help the District secure funding for several improvements to its facilities, with a major emphasis on early childhood education. Following a successful bond campaign, our team designed spaces to expand the District's ECE program, including a community-operated daycare facility, infant and toddler rooms, and before/after school care spaces. The design also provided a dedicated secure entrance, while also ensuring physical connection to the existing school building.

"Early childhood education projects are critical for supporting families and providing young children with an impactful start to their educational journey," says Senior Principal and Architect Tim Ripp, AIA, LEED, who served as Clark & Enersen's principal-in-charge on the project. "It was very rewarding to help Heartland Community Schools prepare for the bond election, celebrate the successful campaign, and design spaces that will serve the school and community for years to come."



Rendering created for Heartland Community Schools bond campaign, featuring an early childhood education space.

Career and Technical Education

As students near the end of their PK-12 journey, it is important to provide them with college and career readiness opportunities. These initiatives help equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to transition into their next educational pursuits or join the workforce. Clark & Enersen has designed numerous career and technical education (CTE) facilities in collaboration with PK-12 schools, community colleges, and universities. These spaces support a wide range of potential career paths related to: agriculture, arts and fabrication, automation engineering/industrial, automotive technology, aviation, business management/administration, construction, cosmetology, culinary skills, government and public administration, health sciences and healthcare, HVAC maintenance, hospitality and tourism, human services, information technology, law and public safety training, manufacturing, robotics, transportation, and welding.

District OR-1, which supports students in Palmyra and Bennet, Neb., and Clark & Enersen have a long, successful history of collaboration, with much of the work being funded by bond campaigns. Most recently, our firm helped the District pass a \$22 million bond to complete improvements to Bennet Elementary and Palmyra Jr.-Sr. High School. This includes a new expansion with approximately 7,300 square feet of shops dedicated to metalworking, woodworking, agriculture, and other CTE focus areas. With growing demand for various trades within the local and national workforce, these spaces will be crucial for preparing students to join the workforce or pursue further education/training within their chosen field.

“Strong and practical career technical education (CTE) facilities and programs are invaluable for our high school students, local businesses, and our school community,” says Michael Hart, superintendent of District OR-1 Public Schools. “The lifelong skills learned and applied through experience with CTE programs are critical for preparing our students to successfully integrate, contribute, and thrive in our rural communities after high school. Even students who may not end up in typical CTE career tracks will find the addition of these skills and experiences beneficial. We are blessed to have a community that strongly supports and understands the value of CTE.”



A shop space located in Palmyra Jr.-Sr. High School, which is part of a 7,300-SF expansion to support the school's CTE programs.

For more information on how Clark & Enersen can help your school support students from ECE through CTE, please visit www.clarkenersen.com.



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