



LEA *Express*

December 14, 2007

A weekly compilation of Association news, minutes, upcoming events and tips for LEA Members.

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Nebraska Teacher Salaries...

The following is an article that will appear in the January '08 issue of The NSEA Voice ... watch for this and a special section on salaries in The Voice.

Nebraska boasts great schools, good roads, a strong economy and wonderful people.

So why are Nebraska's teachers, young and middle-aged, eyeing — and in many cases, taking — teaching jobs in other states? Perhaps the grass *is* greener on the other side of the border.

Two short years ago, Nebraska ranked 38th in the nation in average teacher salary. Today, the state has fallen to 43rd.

More importantly, Nebraska now ranks sixth among the seven contiguous states when it comes to teacher salaries. Salary improvement efforts in Iowa and Wyoming, in particular, have left Nebraska's salaries in the dust.

The Iowa Legislature last year passed a \$145 million teacher quality law that will increase the average salary for Iowa teachers by \$5,400 over the next two years.

That, along with competitive salary increases negotiated at the local level, will raise Iowa teacher salaries up to 25th in the nation by Sept. 2008.

Wyoming has also made a substantial run up the ranking ladder, raising the average base salary in that state more than \$10,000 since 2005-06. Of Wyoming's 49 school districts, 17 now have starting salaries of \$40,000 or more. Every Wyoming school districts pays at least \$33,295 to start, and the average *starting* salary in Wyoming is \$38,600 — a number that is closing in on Nebraska's *average* salary of \$40,382.

Meanwhile, Nebraska's average teacher salary is nearly \$9,000 below the national average.

What does this mean? Without substantial and sustainable action to raise Nebraska teacher salaries, the state could slip further behind, threatening the stability and quality of Nebraska's top tier public school system.

The Nebraska Legislature must act to help bring Nebraska teacher salaries closer to the national average. A Top 10 salary ranking is not a must (though Nebraska students consistently rank in the Top 10 in all measures of academic achievement).

But moving to the national average is prudent, and competitive with other states in the region.

Such a move will keep Nebraska competitive with other states and other professions. Considering that Nebraska already loses nearly half of its teacher college grads to other states and other professions, that's an important issue. And of the half of those teacher college grads who do stay in Nebraska, about half leave the profession within the first five years.

Finally, sustainable funding is a must. Nebraska does not have a dedicated Education Trust Fund. Yet Nebraskans do enjoy excellent roadways, courtesy of a Highway Trust Fund — which makes it easy for our teachers to leave or to commute to higher-paying jobs across the state line. Meanwhile Nebraska ranks 50th — dead last — in state dollars sent to public schools.

We know that a large majority of Nebraskans support increasing salaries to ensure Nebraska can recruit and retain the best teachers possible for our children. Now it's time for the State of Nebraska to step forward and bring teacher salaries to a competitive level.

LEA Money Savers



Check out this new LEA Discount Promotion

- ❖ **Cut Your Prescription Drug Costs**
- ❖ **M&M Marketing, L.L.C.**

Click on the following link to view the additional ways your dues can “pay-off” for you...

<http://www.lincolneducationassociation.org/LEADiscounts.html>

Cut Your Prescription Drug Costs

BCBS Making Health Care Costs Easier to Swallow with Free Generics!

Nobody likes paying more than they have to for anything — including health care products and services. One way you can cut costs is by switching to generic drugs. Generic drugs have the same quality, strength, purity and stability as brand name drugs, but cost much less.

From Jan. 1, 2008, through March 31, 2008, prescriptions filled with a generic drug will be **free** for all eligible Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska members. That's three months of free generic prescription drugs!

If you're already taking a generic prescription drug, whenever you get a refill using either a participating Rx Nebraska retail pharmacy or PrimeMail mail service program, your copay/coinsurance will be waived.

If you're currently taking a brand name drug, now is the time to ask your doctor if a generic drug is available and appropriate to treat your condition, and if so, to write you a new prescription. Then you'll be ready to have it filled when the

program goes into effect on Jan. 1.

After Jan. 1, have the new prescription filled at a participating pharmacy or through PrimeMail, and the usual copay/coinsurance will be waived. (If your plan's prescription drug benefits are subject to a deductible, that deductible must be satisfied first before the free generics offer will be available.)

Continue to Save

In order to continue to save, give generic prescription drugs a try, for free, during the three-month promotional period. Then continue to use them for ongoing savings. In fact, the average cost of a 30-day supply of a generic drug is \$22, compared to an average of \$123 for a brand name drug. Encouraging the use of generic prescription drugs is just one way Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska is helping to control health care costs.

Keep in mind that generic drugs have the same quality, strength, purity and stability as brand name drugs, but cost much less – especially from January 1 through March 31 when you can get them for free.

Questions about the free generics program? Contact the Customer Service Center at the telephone number shown on the back of your Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Nebraska ID card, or visit:

www.genericsfromneblues.com

New Discount Participant and Special Offer

M&M Marketing, L.L.C.

11329 p St

Omaha NE 68137

402-497-2285

800-673-5935

www.freegolfer.com

info@freegolfer.com

LEA Discount ... Mention LEA when purchasing and for each golf package sold, a \$5 donation will made to the LEA Foundation.

Special Offer

Christmas Greetings from Hidden Valley Golf Club.

Hidden Valley Golf Club on the Pine Lake Road has created a special golf pass for the '08 season. For \$54.99, golfers will receive 4 free greens fees, 8 additional two-for-one greens fees, plus pro shop discounts.

We're not playing golf right now, but what a great stocking stuffer this would be for either yourself or your fellow employees!

The golf passes can be ordered by either calling 402-597-2285 or toll free 1-800-673-5935, or online at <http://www.freegolfer.com/golfforfree.html>

Merry Christmas from Hidden Valley Golf Club and M&M Marketing!

LEA Tidbits



- ❖ Mitten Drive
- ❖ ACT Seeks Top Teachers for Summer Program
- ❖ Call for Rookie, Teaching Excellence Nominees
- ❖ Horace Mann Scholarships
- ❖ A Pair of Brand New Red Eyeglasses!
- ❖ About NEA Academy
- ❖ NEA A+ Auto and Home Insurance Program

Mitten Drive

The Lincoln High DECA club, under the sponsorship of LEA Member Tiffany Wlaschin, is conducting a mitten drive to collect mittens, hats, coats and scarves for students at Lincoln High, Elliott Elementary and Park Middle schools. The drive will be from November 19 through December 14.



Please help with this worthy venture, by delivering the items to your FR or the LEA Office, 4920 Normal Blvd, or via school mail to the LEA Office (no box #).

FRs are encouraged to bring the items to the FR Council at Lefler Middle School on December 20.

ACT Seeks Top Teachers for Summer Program

ACT's Visiting Teacher Program seeks four eligible teachers from middle school, junior high or high school in the areas of science, mathematics, social studies and language arts. Minority teachers are especially encouraged to apply.

The Visiting Teacher Program brings teachers from across the United States to ACT's national headquarters in Iowa City, Iowa. The program gives practicing teachers an opportunity to use their classroom expertise and experience to review, evaluate and develop English, math, science and social studies teacher resources and instructional support materials.

The six-week program begins June 16. Teachers will receive a stipend of \$5,500 and the cost of round-trip transportation. ACT will secure and partially subsidize housing.

For details, or to apply, go to ACT's Web site at:
www.act.org/path/secondary/visit.html

The deadline for application is Dec. 28, 2007.

Call for Rookie, Teaching Excellence Nominees

Is there exceptional work under way in your school district? Undoubtedly! So consider nominating one of your colleagues for an NSEA award: the Rookie of the Year; the Award for Teaching Excellence; or Education Support Professional of the Year.

Nominations must be received at NSEA no later than Friday, Feb. 15, 2008. Finalists will be notified in March, and the winners in each category announced at the 2008 NSEA Delegate Assembly in Lincoln April 25-26. Each winner receives a \$500 cash award, and each finalist earns a \$200 cash award. In addition, the winner of the Award for Teaching Excellence will compete for the NEA Teaching Excellence Award and a \$25,000 prize.

All nominations must be sent to: NSEA Awards, Suite 200, 605 S. 14th St., Lincoln, NE 68508-2742. Nominees must be NSEA members.

Nominations may be made through the Web site with required support material mailed to the NSEA. Or, the form for each award can be downloaded from the site and sent, with support materials, to NSEA. The links to the forms will be on the NSEA home page at: www.nsea.org

Horace Mann Scholarships

Now is the time for K-12 educators to apply for a Horace Mann Educator Scholarship, sponsored by the Horace Mann Companies.

Winners will be determined by the quality of a 300-word essay, and involvement in school and community activities. Essays must answer the question 'if you could leave a mark on the world, what would it be and why?'

Now in its fourth year, the scholarship program will award 36 scholarships: one \$5,000 award payable over four years; 15 \$1,000 awards payable over two years; and 20 one-time \$500 awards.

To be eligible, applicants must be K-12 educators with at least two years of experience, employed full or part-time. Scholarship awards must be applied to tuition, fees or expenses for classes at a two or four-year accredited college or university. The application deadline is Feb. 29, 2008.

Interested educators should contact their local Horace Mann agent or apply online at: <https://www.horacemann.com/edscholarship/>

A Pair of Brand New Red Eyeglasses!

One Child's Gift from the NSEA Children's Fund ... The little girl who received the glasses drew the picture and sent it to NSEA. Notice the sequins on the glasses!

The intent of the child's drawing was unmistakable. She was expressing gratitude for her brand new, bright red eyeglasses.

She took great effort to highlight the red frames of the glasses, using glitter as an accent.

A teacher's note added to the story: "Thank you for her glasses. They are cute, and they are red. She was SO excited to get them. She wears them every day and cleans them with lens cleaner, and takes exceptional care of them. Your service is much needed!"

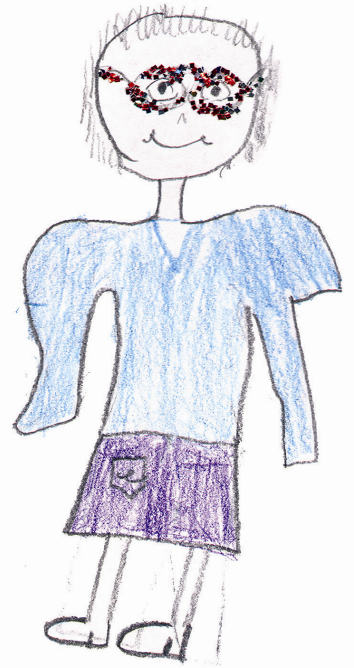
That service is the NSEA Children's Fund. Every day, in classrooms across Nebraska, teachers see such children in need: a child weathering frosty temperatures without a heavy coat or mittens; a child squinting, trying to see without needed eyeglasses; a child in need of dental care.

Teachers frequently dip into their own savings to help these children. But teachers can't help every child in need. That's why NSEA created the Children's Fund, and continues to work to raise money for that Fund.

Since 1994, donations to the Children's Fund have provided thousands upon thousands of dollars to buy glasses, coats, mittens and other items for hundreds of students in need. Nearly \$30,000 a year for each of the last five years has benefited those in need through the Children's Fund.

Contributions to the NSEA Children's Fund come from teachers and a number of businesses around the state. A summer golf tournament raises nearly \$20,000 a year for the Fund. Contributions are tax deductible — and it's important to note that every penny contributed goes to help children. NSEA picks up all the administrative expenses.

For teachers to receive funding for a child's coat, eyeglasses or similar need, there is no red tape, no form to fill out. Contact the NSEA at 475-7611 and ask for Sally Bodtke. Or e-mail her at: sally.bodtke@nsea.org



About NEA Academy

NEA Academy is a *new* online destination for professional needs for teachers. It's new, it's fresh, and it's a work in progress!

NEA Academy is pleased to be able to offer you original online courses such as *I Can Do It* (effective classroom management); local treasurer training; and 'Using NEA Member Benefits as an Organizing Tool.' Soon to come will be courses from a variety of high-quality course providers — at discounted prices for NEA members.

In addition to online courses, NEA Academy is now the official home for the ever-popular lessons and ideas from aol@school, as well.

Over the next several months, as NEA Academy continues to grow and develop, teachers will also find career information and job placement opportunities, as well as online communities that will allow teachers to share thoughts and ideas with peers. To learn more, go to the Web site at: <http://www.nea.org/academy>

NEA A+ Auto and Home Insurance Program

Kristen Smith, Field Representative

E-Mail: kksmith@aplus.com

Home Office: 402-991-6811

Toll Free V-Mail: 800-964-3903 ext. 5991

To receive a Quote: 877-777-1419

We're rated #1 in customer satisfaction

The 2007 California Consumer Complaint Study conducted by the California Department of Insurance (CDI) names California Casualty (underwriter of the NEA Member's A+ Auto & Home Insurance program) as the highest-rated auto insurance company in the state.

The study is published to assist consumers with their insurance purchase by ranking companies according to their justified complaint ratio. When compared to the top 50 auto insurance companies in the state, we hold the number one position with only one justified complaint. We're proud to be rated number one in customer satisfaction. It serves as proof of our dedication to providing outstanding customer and claims service, great benefits and competitive rates.

For more detailed information on the study, visit the CDI web site at www.insurance.ca.gov and click consumers.

If you would like to learn more about our program or if you would like a complimentary auto insurance quote, please give us a call at 1-877-777-1419.

Fireplace Safety Tips

With fall's cooler weather comes an increase in the use of fireplaces in the home. The National Fire Protection Association estimates that thousands of house fires are started each year because of improper use of a fireplace.

Here are some precautions to follow when using your fireplace:

- First, make sure the fireplace was constructed for actual use. Some are decorative fireplaces only.
- The chimney should be in good repair and clean and clear of any debris.
- Make sure that combustible materials – such as curtains, pillows and rugs – are away from the fireplace before you light a fire.
- Never use gasoline, charcoal lighter fluid or any other such fuel to light a fire, as the vapors could explode.
- Do not use charcoal or coal in a fireplace, because of the danger of carbon monoxide.
- Open the damper before lighting a fire, and keep it open until the last ember cools.
- Do not overload the fireplace or encourage a larger fire than the fire box can handle. Fire safety experts suggest keeping the fires small rather than blazing, as the sustained heat can damage the fire box.
- Always use a fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying out.
- Never let children play with fire.



"After having local insurance, I worried that if something did happen, would we get immediate service? The answer came after our first 'fender bender' – A+ jumped on the details right away and our questions were taken care of. We also switch vehicles often, and they always keep us up to date on our insurance payment needs and changes. We also saved quite a bit on our son! Thank you A+!!"

Deb Sloup, Seward Middle School

This is a message provided by the A+ *NEA Members Auto & Home Insurance Program*. Please call us at **1-877-777-1419** if you have questions concerning your auto and home insurance policies.

Calendar of Events



Click on the following link for the LEA Calendar of Events ...

<http://www.lincolneducationassociation.org/calendarofevents.html>