

# Voices of Experience

## Newsletter for OEA-Retired

Omaha Education Association–Retired is an affiliate of NSEA-Retired and NEA-Retired  
Roger Rea, Editor – email: rrea68154@yahoo.com [www.OEARetired.org](http://www.OEARetired.org) May 2021

### Pandemic review on agenda for May 13 OEA-Retired meeting

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted our lives for over a year now. Remote learning, Zoom calls and Zoom meetings, social distancing, and wearing masks are only a few of the most memorable things that have marked the changes in our lives during the past year. The University of Nebraska Medical Center, UNMC, has played a major role in helping Nebraska and the nation cope with the pandemic. It has conducted research on how individuals react to various vaccines as well as the best ways to minimize the symptoms of the disease. Researchers from UNMC will come to the May 13 meeting to describe their research and to answer your questions on the pandemic. Topics to be covered include: the progress of vaccination in Nebraska; common myths about the available vaccines; what we have learned from our experience with the pandemic; what is the prognosis for booster shots to deal with COVID-19 variants; and

when can we expect life to “return to normal?”

Also on the meeting agenda will be updates on LB 147, which impacts our retirement system, and LB 64, which eliminates Nebraska state income tax on Social Security incomes. More details on these bills can be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

The Thursday, May 13 meeting of OEA-Retired will be via Zoom. OEA-Retired members for whom we have a valid email address will receive a link to the Zoom meeting. If you do not get the link in an email, you can find it on our website, [www.OEARetired.org](http://www.OEARetired.org).

The Zoom meeting will start at 10 a.m. Clicking on the link to the meeting will put guests into a “virtual waiting room” until the meeting host is ready to begin the meeting. You will need to enter your full name in order to be admitted to the meeting from this “virtual waiting room”. Plan to attend the May 13<sup>th</sup> meeting to become a better-informed member!

### President’s Message

By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

As you are aware, the Legislative Retirement Committee submitted five bills that would impact our retirement system. Four of those bills were amended into LB 147 and advanced to the full legislature for debate. As advanced, LB 147 would require an IRS compliance audit of the Omaha School Employees’ Retirement System (OSERS); clarify that new retirees may substitute for a maximum of eight days per month in the first 180 days of retirement; transfer all administration and governance of OSERS to the state retirement plans in 2024; and dissolve the current OSERS Board on July 1, 2021 and replace it with a board entirely appointed by the OPS Board of Education. At the time this issue of our newsletter went to the printer, the bill had not received first-round debate. LB 147 has been designated as a Retirement Committee priority bill.

The OEA-Retired Board of Directors voted to oppose LB 147 as advanced because we believe that OSERS members are best served by a retirement office located in Omaha and governed by democratically elected trustees. Initially OEA was neutral on the bill, but expressed mild opposition for a variety of reasons. NSEA has supported guidelines on how frequently new

retirees can substitute, and because that provision would apply to all teachers in the state, the NSEA supported LB 147. Senator Mark Kolterman, Chair of the Retirement Committee, met with OEA representatives and promised them that there would be a teacher member on the Public Employee Retirement Board (PERB, which oversees all state retirement systems) to represent OPS employees. With that assurance, the OEA Board voted to support LB 147. Before any of the bills that impact OSERS had been drafted, the OSERS Board opposed any transfer of governance and management to the state retirement systems. At the hearing for LB 147, OPS testified in favor of the bill, OEA testified in favor of the bill, and OEA-Retired testified in opposition. OSERS submitted written testimony in a neutral capacity.

OEA-Retired was the only entity to testify at the hearing in opposition to LB 147. While NSEA supported provisions of the bill, they did not offer live testimony at the hearing.

The OEA-Retired Board wrote a new business item to be presented at the April 24 meeting of NSEA Delegate Assembly, requesting that guidelines be developed by NSEA when they know that two of their

affiliate organizations disagree about positions on bills before the legislature. The new business item asked for a process to be developed by which NSEA could get input from both affiliates before taking an official position. Prior to DA, I was contacted by NSEA staff and leadership via Zoom to let me know that the committee our new business item was directed to had no authority to deal with this matter. DA was held via Zoom, and to facilitate orderly debate, a standing rule was adopted to prohibit amendments to any item up for

debate and action at DA. That rule applied to any motion that had been submitted for action, whether it was on new business, resolutions, or bylaws changes. NSEA expressed willingness to discuss the issue and work on the intent of the new business item if we wanted that to occur. As a result, I moved to refer the new business item to the appropriate NSEA committee, and that motion passed without opposition. I look forward to the discussion with NSEA representatives on this matter.

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## Retirees: EHA Health Insurance Coverage

Public school retirees aged 50 to 64, who have been insured through the Educators Health Alliance (EHA) for five years immediately prior to their retirement, can continue their EHA coverage through the EHA Direct Bill Plan. Current premiums and deductible options can be found on the EHA website, [www.ehaplan.org](http://www.ehaplan.org). There is no change in plan design for 2021-22 and premiums will increase by 4.9%. A video explaining retiree coverage can be found on the EHA website.

Participants are no longer required to pay a separate Special Services fee in order to be eligible for the EHA Direct Bill plan.

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## OEA-Retired meetings and officers

OEA-Retired will have one more general meeting this year. The meeting will be held via Zoom from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. The meeting is scheduled for: **May 13, Thurs.** – Pandemic Review / Health Updates

OEA-Retired will follow recommendations from the Douglas County Health Department regarding in-person meetings. It is our hope to return to in-person meetings next year. The schedule for next year's meetings will be printed in the first issue of *Voices of Experience* this fall. In-person meetings will be held at the OEA office, 4202 South 57<sup>th</sup> Street,

If OPS schools are closed or delayed due to inclement weather on the date of our meeting, the OEA-Retired in-person meeting will be canceled. OEA-Retired will not meet in person if OPS schools are closed for health reasons. Notice will be sent out if the session is re-scheduled for a later date.

Elections for officers for OEA-Retired are generally set for the May meeting each year. This year none of the officer positions are up for election, so there will be no general election this May.

The OEA-Retired officers for 2020-2021, and their terms of office, are:

**President** = Walta Sue Dodd (2019-2022)

**Vice President** = Scott McGinty (2019-2022)

**Secretary** = Ruby M. Davis (2020-2023)

**At-large Directors** = Sue Kalina (2020-2023); Doreen Jankovich (2020-2023); Deborah Pauley (2019-2022); Cheryl Richardson (2019-2022)

**Bookkeeper and Newsletter** = Roger Rea

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## NSEA-Retired Election Results

NSEA-Retired recently held elections for delegates to both NSEA Delegate Assembly and NEA Representative Assembly. In addition, Ruby Davis was elected Metro District Director on the NSEA-Retired Board. Metro District delegates to NSEA Delegate Assembly were: Roger Rea, Walta Sue Dodd, Carol Krejci, Susan Kalina, Liz Rea, and Ruby Davis. Doreen Jankovich was elected as an alternate delegate. Metro District will be represented at NEA Representative Assembly in July by: Roger Rea and Walta Sue Dodd.

Ruby Davis is the current NSEA-Retired Secretary. The election of Ruby Davis as Metro District Director creates a vacancy for NSEA-Retired Secretary. The NSEA-Retired Board will appoint a Secretary to fill Ruby's remaining unexpired term. If you are interested in that position, send an email expressing your interest in the position as well as a brief summary of your Association experience to NSEA-Retired President, De Tonack, at [dtack@neb.rr.com](mailto:dtack@neb.rr.com).

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## Reminders

This is the last issue of *Voices of Experience* for this school year. You will receive the next issue of the newsletter prior to our first meeting (which will be sometime in October 2021) for the 2021-22 school year.

If you change addresses for next year, be sure to contact Lorrie at the OEA, 402.346.0400, or by emailing her at [lorrie.krejci@nsea.org](mailto:lorrie.krejci@nsea.org) to give her your new mailing address. Keep your address up-to-date, and you will not miss out on any of our newsletters!

Annual dues for OEA-Retired will be billed in the fall. If you are not a life member of the association, be sure to return your dues notice with the proper payment to ensure that you are not "dropped" from our mailing list!

# LB 64 advances – but with conditions

By: Roger Rea, NSEA-Retired Vice President

Social Security income was never intended to be a source of revenue for the states – it was intended to keep our elderly and disabled citizens out of poverty. Only 13 states tax Social Security benefits. Of the seven contiguous states (NE, IA, SD, WY, CO, KS, and MO) Nebraska has the highest tax on Social Security. IA, and MO have phased out their state tax on the benefit, WY and SD do not have a state income tax, and CO and KS tax the benefit at lower rates than does Nebraska.

Senator Brett Lindstrom of Omaha introduced LB 64, which would eliminate the state taxation of Social Security benefits over a five-year time period. The bill advanced to the full legislature for consideration with a Revenue Committee amendment that extends the phase-out period to ten years. On April 26, LB 64 was advanced to Select File (second reading) by a vote of 47-0. To become law, bills must pass three rounds of debate in the Unicameral and be signed by the Governor.

Several senators expressed concern at the ultimate loss of revenue that LB 64 would produce, and asked that the bill be pared back a bit to further reduce the impact on state revenues. In consideration of that

concern, the time frame to eliminate state taxation of Social Security was extended from five years to ten by the Revenue Committee amendment. The Fiscal Note for LB 64 showed a projected loss in revenue of \$138 million over ten years, or roughly \$14 million per year. Senator Lindstrom indicated that he was open to amending the bill to further lessen the fiscal impact when the bill is considered for second reading. The state tax forecasting board will have a new projection of future revenue soon. It will take a few days to estimate the impact of any further modifications of LB 64.

OEA-Retired members are encouraged to contact Sen. Lindstrom and their home district senator expressing their feelings on taxation of Social Security. It is useful to note that Social Security benefits are almost entirely spent in the communities where the recipients live, and that a lower tax rate on the benefit means more disposable income for the retiree – hence more spending (and higher sales tax revenues) as well as more economic impact on the community. Senators can be emailed by using their first initial followed by their last name, and the extension, @leg.ne.gov. For example, Sen. Brett Lindstrom's email address is [blindstrom@leg.ne.gov](mailto:blindstrom@leg.ne.gov).

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## OPS Phase 2 Bond Update

By: Cheryl Richardson, OEA-Retired Board Member

As the citizens of Omaha see five new schools being built, OPS has given four of these schools names, mascots and colors. The middle school is the only one without a name. OPS recently updated their policy to not name any new OPS school building or facility acquired after April 5, 2021 for an individual. This includes buildings or facilities that are donated.

Some details on the new buildings:

### High School at 60<sup>th</sup> and L:

- Named Buena Vista High School in recognition of the beautiful views in this area, adds to the identity of South Omaha and the student population; Colors will be silver, black, and burgundy; Mascot is the Bison, a pragmatic resourceful animal; Principal will be Carrie Carr

### High School at 156<sup>th</sup> and Ida:

- Named Westview High School, in recognition of the view to West Omaha; Colors will be orange, black and blue; The mascot will be the Wolverine, a symbol of fearlessness and courage; Tom Lee will be the principal

### Elementary School at 10<sup>th</sup> and Pine:

- Named Pine Elementary School in recognition of the street and the many pine trees on the campus;

Colors are green, white and gray; The mascot is a porcupine.

### Elementary School at Fort Crook and Giles Road:

- Named Forest Station Elementary School in recognition of its proximity to Fontonelle Forest and nearby trains; Colors are green, white, and tan; The mascot is the owl.

Phase 2 Bond projects are moving along. There are 25 Active Projects. Seven of the projects are out for bid/award, five are in closeout, four are complete, eight are in construction, and one in design. At Westview High, the sports fields are graded, the swimming pool basin is complete, drywall is complete and painting is in progress. Buena Vista High has drywall finished and painted, west wing elevator completed, teacher planning area has been framed, and the site grading is nearing completion.

Northwest High has had upgrades that are awesome! The entry area is colorful and welcoming and has new security and office access. A new auxiliary gym has been constructed and is bright and colorful! Students with special needs were engaged in great learning experiences when I toured the building. Lewis and Clark is being expanded with 15 new classrooms being added. Highland, Masters and

Edison Elementary Schools are also receiving additions. The projects are all being completed on time and within budget.

I have been through Buena Vista High and Northwest High and was very impressed with the use of natural light, bright colors, and how welcoming the schools are.

### Laurels Night held in Sept.

OEA recognizes its members who retire each year with an awards celebration known as Laurels Night. The pandemic has caused a delay in the recognition dinner this year. The dinner was cancelled for 2020 retirees last year. Laurels Night to recognize OEA members who retired in the past two years will be held on Sunday, September 19, 2021 at the Livestock Exchange Building, 4920 S. 30<sup>th</sup> Street. A total of 127 former OEA members will be recognized

## OEA-Retired

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## OEA-Retired Website Update

By: Scott McGinty, OEA-Retired Webmaster

Thanks to the 134 members who have registered on our website, ***OEARetired.org***. Please register today if you haven't done so. Go to ***OEARetired.org*** and click "Join Here" on the right side of the page. You will be taken to a page listing members. We have already entered the names of all OEA-Retired members who are on our mailing list on this page, so just click on your name. You will then be taken to another "Join Here" page. Click on "Join Here" and a page will appear where you provide registration information. We do need your email address (to be able to contact you quickly), but not all information that is requested is required. If you don't want to supply something, simply skip it. Your email address is very

important! Your email address is your log-in identification for the web page.

Once registered, you have access to all content on the web page. Major areas of the website are accessed across the top of the page as well as down the left side. We also use your email address as a way of contacting the membership with timely information between issues of our newsletter. Because of COVID-19, we are holding meetings via ZOOM. The newsletter and website are used to disseminate information that allows you to join those meetings.

Along with our newsletter, the website is another way that we can communicate with you as an organization. Please utilize this resource!

## OEA Foundation awards \$379,800 in scholarships

The OEA Foundation was established in 1964 as a charitable arm of the Omaha Education Association. The Foundation has funded about 100 scholarships annually. This year the Foundation granted 89 scholarships to 78 Omaha Metro Area high school graduates (some honorees received more than one scholarship). A total of \$379,800 was awarded this year.

The scholarships are supported by donations from the public to the OEA Foundation. A complete listing of the scholarships can be found on the OEA

website, ***www.omahaoea.org***.

Click on the *OEA Foundation Scholarships* link at the top of the page to find details on the various scholarships that are awarded every year.

You can make a tax-deductible contribution to the OEA Foundation by sending a check (payable to OEA Foundation) to: OEA Foundation, 4202 S. 57<sup>th</sup> Street, Omaha NE 68117. You can contact Linda Richter, Executive Director for the Foundation, at ***oefoundation@gmail.com*** for additional information.