



NEWS RELEASE

For additional information, please contact David Jespersen by phone (402-471-4537) or email (david.jespersen@nebraska.gov)

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NASBE HONORS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS FROM THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, MICHIGAN, AND NEBRASKA WITH NATIONAL PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD

This news release was created by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE).

Alexandria, Va.—The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) is pleased to announce the recipients of NASBE's 2022 Distinguished Service Award, who represent state boards of education from the District of Columbia, Michigan, and Nebraska. This national award honors current and former state board members who have made exceptional contributions to education. It is given to three outstanding leaders each year and is the highest award NASBE can bestow on a state board of education member.

Maureen Nickels was elected to the Nebraska State Board of Education in 2014, where she served as vice president and then two years as president, leading the board through the pandemic. During her tenure, Nickels chaired committees on educator effectiveness, worked with state leaders on providing compliance flexibility for local schools and districts, and currently chairs the Budget and Finance Committee, where she led the board's approval of the state's use of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief federal funds.

Nickels was an elementary school teacher for 26 years and an organizational specialist with the Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA). An active participant in NASBE, Nickels represented her board on various committees and study groups. She is also a board member of the Heartland Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), which supports abused and neglected children in the court system, and district director of NSEA-Retired, which advocates on educator benefits and retirement issues. She is completing her second and final term on the state board.

"Maureen was instrumental in reinventing teacher listening sessions to be structured to hear more from the participants rather than state board members," said Nebraska state board chair Patsy Koch Johns. "This new format has resulted in more engaged participants and board members having actionable follow-up opportunities for policy and priorities."

Alex O'Sullivan graduated from BASIS DC Public Charter School in 2022 and was a student representative on the District of Columbia State Board of Education from 2019 to 2021. He was also a semifinalist for the 2022 U.S. Presidential Scholars Program and began attending Yale University in fall 2022.

As a student representative, O'Sullivan was an active leader of the Student Advisory Committee, a group of DC high school students that meets monthly, provides student perspectives on issues of policy before the state board, and advocated for students during the pandemic. O'Sullivan cosponsored the board's resolution SR20-9, which includes recommendations on increasing the recruitment and retention of Black/African American teachers. He also was instrumental in the proposal and

passage of SR21-3, which increased the number of student representatives actively serving on the state board from two members to four, a shift that mandates that at least one student representative live or come from a school in either Ward 7 or 8, whose residents are historically underrepresented in school leadership. The resolution also requires input by the Student Advisory Committee on all nonceremonial resolutions prior to a vote by the state board.

In January 2022, the state board passed a [resolution](#) formally recognizing the contributions of O’Sullivan, stating that he “has proven himself to be a dedicated scholar and state board representative even as the COVID-19 pandemic impacted students in immeasurable ways.”

Casandra Ulbrich, PhD, was elected to the Michigan State Board of Education in 2006 and reelected to an eight-year term in 2014, where she has served as president for the past four years. She was co-president for two years and vice president for six. Ulbrich was appointed by the governor to serve as an alternate commissioner on the Midwest Higher Education Compact and as a commissioner for the Education Commission of the States. She also serves on the board of the Network for Public Education and is the spokesperson for the For MI Kids, For Our Schools Coalition. Having worked in higher education administrations for over 20 years, Ulbrich is currently vice chancellor for institutional advancement at the University of Michigan–Dearborn.

Ulbrich previously represented the State of Michigan in renewing the Michigan/Taiwan Teacher Exchange Agreement in Taipei and has been recognized as one of Michigan’s 40 under 40 by Crain’s *Detroit Business*, received Macomb Intermediate School District’s Service to Schools Award, the Macomb Bar Foundation’s Liberty Bell Award, the Public Policy Pioneer award from the Michigan Council on Education Women’s Network, and an honorary degree from her alma mater, St. Clair Community College. She was press secretary for former House Democratic Whip David Bonior and served on the Detroit Healthy Neighborhoods board, was president of Women Officials’ Network Governing Board, chair of Automation Alley STEM Education Subcommittee, member of the Walter P. Reuther Library Advisory Committee, and served on NASBE’s Government Affairs Committee and Public Education Positions Committee.

“Dr. Ulbrich is a bipartisan leader who has earned the respect of her colleagues through her continuous efforts to reach compromise by listening to all voices,” said board colleague Dr. Judith Pritchett. “She is steadfast in her belief that a system of quality schools includes transparency and oversight with a focus on equitable high expectations for all students,” said board colleague Dr. Pamela Pugh.

“The 2022 Distinguished Service Award winners represent the very best in citizen leadership in America,” said NASBE President and CEO Paolo DeMaria. “Maureen and Casandra have been purposeful and collaborative in their leadership approach, ensuring diverse voices always inform their board’s decision making. How fitting that they are honored alongside Alex, a student, who was instrumental in expanding the number of student voices on the DC State Board of Education. Congratulations to the 2022 Distinguished Service Awardees!”

The 2022 Distinguished Service Awards will be presented at [NASBE’s annual conference](#) in Phoenix, AZ, October 26–28.

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David Jespersen
Public Information Officer, Nebraska Department of Education
402-471-4537
david.jespersen@nebraska.gov
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