



NEWS RELEASE

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

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Nebraska Educators Rising Empowers Tomorrow's Leaders At National Conference

Nearly 150 student members, chapter teacher leaders, and adult chaperones from Educators Rising chapters across Nebraska attended the 2025 Educators Rising National Conference, held June 26-29, 2025, at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Florida. With more than 3,400 attendees—including students, teacher leaders, administrators, and professionals in education—the event offered a rich experience filled with networking opportunities, leadership development, and national competitions.

This year's theme, "Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders," was the guiding vision for the past year as chapters across the country embraced the theme through local initiatives that uplifted student voice, celebrated diversity, and built stronger bridges between aspiring educators and the communities they serve. The national conference reflected the culmination of these efforts, highlighting student achievement and reaffirming the importance of nurturing future educators who reflect and represent the students they will one day teach. Nebraska participants joined nationwide efforts like a service project in partnership with A Gift for Teaching to collect school supplies for Central Florida classrooms.

The conference featured two impactful keynote speakers. Missy Testerman, the 2024 National Teacher of the Year, opened the event with an inspiring message on the power of passion and building cultural bridges in the classroom. Later, Nick Moore, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education, spoke at the Member Recognition Luncheon about the responsibility and long-term impact of those entering the teaching profession. Both speakers encouraged attendees to stay committed to their career goals and continue to advocate for the field of education.

With more than 70 breakout sessions, students explored topics such as student leadership, diversity in teaching, pedagogy, community engagement, and college readiness. Nebraska students had the opportunity to showcase their skills in more than 40 competitive events, including public speaking, ethical dilemma, lesson planning, and early childhood education presentations.

The conference also featured a wide array of engaging activities beyond formal sessions. Students participated in a College & Innovation Fair, a lip sync battle and karaoke night, and daily Eddy Bear Spirit Awards, which recognized chapters for outstanding enthusiasm and collaboration. A National Signing Event allowed graduating seniors to formally commit to pursuing careers in education. Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview, committed to studying Early Childhood Education & Elementary Education at Northeast Community College & Wayne State College, and Lilly Elsasser, Ralston, signed her commitment to study Elementary Education at Concordia University Nebraska.

A proud moment for Nebraska came during the Closing General Session, when Owen Elsasser, a graduate of Ralston High

School, was elected as the 2025-2026 Educators Rising Vice President of Communications. He was elected by delegates from each state association from a field of very strong candidates after submitting a written application and campaign video. Owen will serve alongside President Alliana Walters of Spanish Fork High School in Utah, Vice President of Service Faith Gonder from Perry High School in Ohio, and Vice President of Engagement Haylie Johnson of Waterbury Career Academy in Connecticut. Owen's election is a testament to Nebraska's strong leadership pipeline and the commitment of its students to shaping the future of education at a national level.

One of the highlights of the conference, is competing in the national contests and competitions. With over 2,000 students competing, Nebraska was represented by 114 competitors (61 entries) in a variety of events in the Junior Varsity (grades 9-10) and Varsity (grades 11-12) divisions. With a blend of individual, dual, and team events, there are 25 competitions and three contests offered, which are authentic opportunities for student members to stretch their creativity, commitment, and professionalism. The Top Three finalists in competitions receive medals/trophies, and ribbons are awarded to the finalists who score at least 90 points in the contests: Blue Ribbon (98-100 points), Red Ribbon (94-97 points), White Ribbon (90-93 points). During the Closing General Session and Awards Celebration on Sunday, June 29, the Top Ten semi-finalists and the Top Three finalists for each competition and contest were recognized. The Top Ten Semi-Finalists from Nebraska include:

Third Place

- Riley Hopkins, Bayard – Exploring Non-Core Subject Teaching Careers Varsity
- Kenya Calderon & Marco Guerrero Miranda, Buena Vista – Inside Our Schools-Spanish Varsity
- Itzel Montoya Hernandez, Omaha Bryan – Children's Literature Pre-K-Spanish Varsity
- Aaliyah Torres & Thuy Nguyen, South Sioux City – Researching Learning Challenges JV

Fourth Place

- Camila Martinez Gutierrez & Denise Acevedo Jara, Omaha South – Children's Literature Pre-K Spanish Varsity
- Shayla Jacobsen, Plainview – Job Interview Varsity

Sixth Place

- Violet Casady, Esthefany Contreras-Suarez, Genevieve Hodoly, & Vivian Hodoly, Omaha South – Outstanding Chapter Varsity
- Estefani Aguilar Rodriguez, Omaha South – Children's Literature K-3-Spanish Varsity

Seventh Place

- Amy Albro, Bayard – Exploring Support Service Careers Varsity
- Alexis Kennedy, Eliza Raven, & Ariel Horn, Omaha Westview – Inside Our Schools JV
- Kennedy Geiger, Westside – Children's Literature Pre-K JV

Eighth Place

- Zachary Havlovic, Omaha Westview – Exploring Education Administration Careers Varsity
- Jenna Smith, Omaha Westview – Job Interview JV

Ninth Place

- Daisy Altamarino, Omaha Bryan – Educators Rising Moment-Spanish Varsity

Blue Ribbon

- Lea Hanson & Sophia Bouman, Omaha Burke – Project Visualize Varsity

Red Ribbon

- Lauryn Breitreutz, Centennial – Interactive Bulletin Board-Middle/High Varsity

White Ribbon

- Sarah Payne, Centennial – Teacher Created Materials Varsity

About Educators Rising

Educators Rising is a Nebraska Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) committed to ensuring that students interested in Education careers are equipped with the experience and skills needed to thrive in the profession. The organization's vision is to end the teacher shortage by creating new and better pathways into the profession. Its mission is to support and grow future educators who will lead in their communities and champion quality education for all. Through alignment with Education & Training courses, leadership development & personal growth opportunities at conferences events, and access to competitive events and recognition programs, Educators Rising empowers high school students as they prepare for careers in Education. Nebraska Educators Rising continues to grow with 37 active chapters and over 550 members across the state. These chapters play a vital role in cultivating the next generation of highly skilled educators who are committed to strengthening schools and communities through public service. For more information about Educators Rising, please visit www.edrisingneb.org. Nebraska Educators Rising is supported through the Nebraska Center for Student Leadership and Expanded Learning at the Nebraska Department of Education.

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