



NEWS RELEASE

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Nebraska Educators Rising Members Lead with Passion at National Conference

More than 120 Nebraska student members, chapter teacher leaders, and adult chaperones attended the 2026 Educators Rising National Conference, held June 20-23 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon. The event brought together more than 3,200 attendees from across the country, creating a vibrant community of aspiring educators who engaged in competitive events, interactive workshops, and leadership development experiences to strengthen their skills and expand their professional networks.

Guided by the theme “Teach with Passion, Lead with Purpose,” the conference highlighted both the heart and impact of the teaching profession through breakout sessions, hands-on learning, and a College and Innovation Fair. Attendees also connected through networking opportunities and contributed to a national service project supporting Portland youth through project: education, art, recreation. Keynote speakers Ashlie Crosson, the 2025 National Teacher of the Year, and Bryan Butcher Jr., the 2025 Oregon State Teacher of the Year, inspired participants to amplify student voice, build strong classroom communities, and lead with purpose in their future careers.

Through the workshops offered during the conference, students explored a wide range of topics including leadership development, college preparation, classroom innovation, and advocacy in education. Nebraska was proudly represented in the conference program, with Ariel Horn from Omaha Westview and Thuy Nguyen from South Sioux City, 2026-27 State Officers, leading a breakout session focused on building an effective program of work, and Andrea Burton and Nadine Reyes, teacher leaders from Omaha Burke High School, presenting a session centered on college readiness and student success.

The conference also featured a National Signing Event, which celebrated graduating seniors committed to pursuing careers in education. Congratulations to these future educators from Nebraska!

- Ashlee Cavender, Ralston – studying Music Education at University of Nebraska-Omaha
- Grace Johnson, Ralston – studying FCS Education at University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- Kaydence Doremus, Waverly – studying Special Education at Wayne State College
- Harley Franzen, Waverly – studying Elementary Education at University of Nebraska-Lincoln
- Esther VanOverbeke – studying Agriculture Education at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Nebraska members were also recognized at the national level for their academic achievement, leadership, and commitment to the teaching profession. Nine students earned distinction as Educators Rising STAR Members.

- Omaha Westview: Ariel Horn, Kennedy Geiger
- Ralston: Ashlee Cavender, Grace Johnson
- Scottsbluff: Karli Knaub
- South Sioux City: Thuy Nguyen, Marlee Scoville
- Waverly: Esther VanOverbeke
- Wayne State College: Owen Elsasser

Three Nebraska members were inducted into the Educators Rising Honor Society, recognizing their academic excellence and dedication to a future in education.

- Kobie Kosek, Centennial
- Landon Hergert, Plainview
- Caleb Wees, Westside

Nebraska was also represented among national scholarship recipients with Ashlee Cavender from Ralston earning an Educators Rising postsecondary scholarship, and Thuy Nguyen and Marlee Scoville from South Sioux City receiving conference scholarships to support their attendance at the event.

Owen Elsasser of Omaha, Nebraska, was recognized for his outstanding leadership and service as the 2025-26 Educators Rising National Vice President of Communications. A graduate of Ralston High School and current student at Wayne State College, Owen has demonstrated a deep commitment to advancing the teaching profession through both state and national leadership roles. Throughout his year of service, he played an integral role in representing Educators Rising, helping to amplify student voice through national initiatives, conferences, and outreach efforts. At the 2026 National Conference, he served as a key student leader, leading general sessions, hosting workshops, and connecting with members from across the nation.

One of the highlights of the conference is competing in the national contests. Nebraska was represented by 92 competitors (65 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 27 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% of points available in the contests: Blue Ribbon (98-100%), Red Ribbon (94-97%), White Ribbon (90-93%). During the Closing General Session and Awards Celebration on Tuesday, June 23, 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:

First Place

- Sarah Kula, Gretna High School – Children’s Literature Pre-K Varsity

Second Place

- Abigaile Walgren, Centennial Public Schools – Job Interview JV
- Jacie Thompson & Joelle Thompson, Omaha Westview High School – Inside Our Schools Varsity

Third Place

- Corey Payne, Centennial Public Schools – Job Interview JV
- Landon Hergert, Plainview High School – Exploring Non-Core Subject Teaching Careers Varsity

Fourth Place

- Chloe Wilkins, Omaha Westview High School – Job Interview Varsity

Fifth Place

- Marin Olson & Katie Thomas, Lincoln – The Career Academy – Children’s Literature Pre-K Varsity
- Camila Martinez Gutierrez & Denise Acevedo Jara, Omaha South High School – Children’s Literature Pre-K Spanish Varsity
- Luke Petersen, Omaha Westview High School – Exploring Education Administration Careers JV

Sixth Place

- Addalyn Kirstine, Kenesaw Public Schools – Exploring Education Administration Careers JV
- Brittany Ozuna-Flores, Omaha Bryan High School – Educators Rising Moment Spanish JV

Seventh Place

- Marlee Scoville & Isabella Digno, South Sioux City High School – Researching Learning Challenges JV

Ninth Place

- Alyaha Hellner, Kenesaw Public Schools – Exploring Education Administration Careers JV
- Esther VanOverbeke, Waverly Public Schools – Job Interview Varsity

Tenth Place

- Ofelia Cruz & Melissa Mejia Perez, Omaha Bryan High School – Ethical Dilemma JV
- Thuy Nguyen, Kiya Rodriguez, & Mario Torres, South Sioux City High School – Researching Learning Challenges Varsity

Red Ribbon

- Jojo Church, Lincoln – The Career Academy – Interactive Bulletin Board Elementary Varsity

Ninth Place

- Sarah Payne & Kobie Kosek, Centennial Public Schools – Teacher Created Materials Varsity

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About Educators Rising

Educators Rising is a Nebraska Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO) dedicated to developing the next generation of education professionals. The organization’s purpose is to empower the next generation to lead the future of learning, and its mission is to inspire and equip young people to design and influence that future as educators, makers, and

civic leaders. Through strong alignment with Education & Training courses, leadership development opportunities, and participation in conferences, competitions, and recognition programs, Educators Rising provides students with meaningful experiences that prepare them to thrive in the education profession.

Nebraska Educators Rising continues to grow with 38 active chapters and nearly 600 members across the state. By fostering passion, purpose, and leadership, Educators Rising supports these high school students in becoming innovative educators and advocates who will positively impact schools and communities in Nebraska. 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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