

# 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) October 2023

### OPS Supt., OSERS Director scheduled to talk at Oct. 19 meeting

The top management for OPS is currently in a state of transition. Matthew Ray has been appointed as Interim Superintendent to replace Cheryl Logan. The search process for a permanent Superintendent was underway as this issue of *Voices of Experience* went to the printer. The governance and management of the Omaha School Employees' Retirement System, OSERS, is being transitioned to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems, NPERS, with the transition scheduled to be complete by September 1, 2024. The October 19 meeting of OEA-Retired will focus on both of those transitions.

Interim Superintendent Matthew Ray will be at the Oct. 19 meeting of OEA-Retired to outline his vision for the school district if he becomes the permanent superintendent. He will address such issues as: the commitment of OPS to fully fund OSERS; his plan to improve communication between employees and the

OPS administration; and his ideas for improving classroom instruction. He will also respond to questions from members who attend the meeting.

Interim OSERS Director Shane Rhian will also be at the meeting. He will give an update on the transition of OSERS to NPERS; discuss the OPS responses to the recent State Auditor Report on OSERS; give a report on the financial status of OSERS; and answer questions from members attending the meeting.

The Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting will be an in-person meeting at the OEA Office, 4202 S. 57<sup>th</sup> Street, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Following CDC guidelines, face masks are optional for this meeting. If you need driving directions, please call the OEA office at 402-346-0400. Mark your calendars for the meeting, and bring your questions!

## President's Message By: Walta Sue Dodd, OEA-Retired President

*"The new year stands before us, like a chapter in a book, waiting to be written."* Melody Beattie

Next year will mark the end of OSERS as we knew it. On September 1, 2024, the governance and management of OSERS will be transferred to the Nebraska Public Employees Retirement Systems (NPERS) and the Public Employees Retirement Board (PERB). We will all need to take a leap of faith, and believe that OSERS will be in good hands.

**Call to Action:** LB 573 (passed in 2023) will divert public tax dollars to pay for private schools. A petition drive this summer gathered more than 117,000 signatures to put this matter on the ballot for a vote of the people in 2024. This October, the Secretary of State will announce whether our petition drive met the requirements to appear on the November 2024 General Election ballot. We cannot wait on this announcement. We must continue to educate the voting public on the dangers of LB 573. Outside groups are providing funding to help defeat any ballot election on LB 573. You can help!

- Hold your own fundraiser to support the effort to

repeal LB 573 (which is being led by *Support Our Schools*).

- Outside forces are using the Freedom of Information Act to get school records of teachers and staff that worked on *Support Our Schools Nebraska* to bring charges against those that used their school email addresses. Talk to active educators. Tell them to only use their personal email accounts for this kind of activity.
- Get *Support Our Schools Nebraska* yard signs, take your picture with the sign, and then send the picture to the NSEA.
- Go to Facebook and click **LIKE** on [supportourschools.org](http://supportourschools.org).
- Donate to help with the campaign on [supportourschoolsnebraska.org](http://supportourschoolsnebraska.org).
- Sign up for NSEA Legislative Updates at: [www.nsea.org/subscribe](http://www.nsea.org/subscribe)

**Remember – "Now, more than ever, the commitment continues!"**

# OSERS Transition Update

By: Roger Rea

The management and governance of the Omaha School Employees' Retirement System, OSERS, is being transferred to the Nebraska Public Employee Retirement Systems, NPERS, in Lincoln. The transition will be complete on September 1, 2024.

OPS currently manages the retirement system benefits, and has assigned Shane Rhian, Chief Financial Officer for OPS, as the interim OSERS Administrator. An interim Board of Trustees has been appointed by the OPS Board of Education to oversee the transition. That Board consists of members of the OPS Board of Education, representatives of employee groups, and members of the public.

A recent audit of OSERS by the Nebraska State Auditor revealed some issues in the transition process that needed to be addressed. Mr. Rhian has stated that the concerns raised in the state audit are being addressed. OSERS now has four full-time staff, which is the same number of staff members that OSERS had in the past. All staff members are being cross-trained so that the duties will be "covered" in the event one of the employees is absent or departs unexpectedly.

OSERS has sent two letters about the transition process to members, and plans three more: one will be sent in September or October 2023, and two more will be sent in 2024 prior to the completion of the transition process on September 1, 2024. While only two OSERS Transition Trustee meetings were held last year, Mr. Rhian stated that quarterly meetings will be held for the remainder of the transition process. Those

meetings will be held at 4 p.m. at the TAC building on the first Thursday of September and December, 2023.

NPERS has hired a third-party vendor to manage the transition process. Both OPS and OSERS staff are working with this vendor to help assure a smooth process. This includes documenting processes and procedures used to assist members who are contemplating retirement; developing ways to report salaries, contributions, and service credits to NPERS after the transition is complete; and digitization of OSERS hard copy records to transfer to NPERS.

At the September 7 meeting for OSERS, Rhian stated that one of the recommendations from the State Auditor was that the State Service Annuity (which is paid by the State of Nebraska and added to the monthly OSERS benefit payment) should be credited with cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) going forward. Rhian stated that since this payment comes from the State of Nebraska, not the OSERS trust fund, he would be requesting additional state funding to cover any COLA that is applied to the service annuity in the future.

The OSERS trust fund is now managed by the Nebraska Investment Council, NIC. As of June 30, 2023 the OSERS trust fund balance was \$1.486 billion. For the past year, the fund earned an annual return of 8.8% (which was greater than was anticipated from the investment mix adopted for OSERS), and has earned a compound 8.6% return for the past three years.

Additional information about OSERS is available on the OSERS website, [www.ops.org/retirement](http://www.ops.org/retirement).

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## OEA-Retired meeting calendar set

OEA-Retired will have four general meetings this year. The meetings will be held either via Zoom or in-person at the OEA office, 4202 South 57<sup>th</sup> Street, from 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. The type of meeting (Zoom or in-person) will be announced in *Voices of Experience* prior to each meeting. The meeting dates and tentative programs as well as NSEA-Retired meetings of note are:

**Oct. 18, Wed.** NSEA-Retired Fall Conference at Stuhr Museum, Grand Island

**Oct. 19, Thurs.** – OPS Superintendent and OSERS reports

**Oct. 25, Wed.** – Medicare Seminar, Ft. Omaha MCC Campus

**Dec. 14, Thurs.** – Tax Tips and Tips on Wills and Estate Planning (Bridget O'Malley)

**March 7, Thurs.** –Legislative Update; History of Omaha Cemeteries

**April 19-20, Fri. and Sat.** – NSEA Delegate Assembly (Lincoln)

**May 9, Thurs.** –OEA-Retired elections; Program TBD

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.

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## OEA-Retired election results

OEA-Retired officers serve for three-year terms, with a maximum of two consecutive terms in any one position. At the May 18, 2023 meeting of OEA-Retired, Doreen Jankovich was elected as Secretary, Sue Kalina was re-elected as At-large Director, and Ruby Davis was elected to her first term as At-large Director.

The OEA-Retired officers for 2023-2024, and their terms of office, are:

**President** = Walta Sue Dodd (2022-2025)

**Vice President** = Cheryl Richardson (2022-2025)

**Secretary** = Doreen Jankovich (2023-2026)

**At-large Directors** = Sue Kalina (2023-2026); Ruby Davis (2023-2026); Deborah Pauley (2022-2025); Sherry Brodkey (2022-2025)  
**Bookkeeper and Newsletter** = Roger Rea

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## Sitzman receives Sierra Club award

OPS retired counselor and OEA-Retired Life Time member Faye Sitzman recently received a

national award for her long service to the Sierra Club Outing Program. Faye was awarded the 2023 Oliver Kehrlein Outings Leadership Award. This award honors Oliver Kehrlein, who was very dedicated to the Sierra Outings Program. For fifty years, Faye Sitzman has led outings and service trips for the Sierra Club. She is most deserving of this award. Congratulations, Faye!

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## Medicare information sessions scheduled – Omaha seminar is Oct. 25

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska will once again host Medicare information seminars around the state. Four in-person seminars will be held in Omaha, Lincoln, Norfolk and Kearney. The Omaha in-person seminars, which will last about 90 minutes, will be held October 25 at the Fort Omaha Campus of Metropolitan Community College in the Swanson Conference Center, Building 22. The Swanson Conference Center is also known as the Culinary Arts Building, and is found just north of Sorensen Parkway at 30<sup>th</sup> Street. The address is 5730 N. 30<sup>th</sup> Street. Two sessions are scheduled for Wednesday, Oct. 25. The first will start 9:30 a.m., with a repeat at 1:30 p.m. On-site registration will begin 30 minutes prior to the start of the session.

Three virtual seminars will be held: Thurs. Oct. 26 (9 am); Mon., Oct 30 (2 pm); and Thurs., Nov. 9 (5 pm). The virtual seminars will last about an hour. To help facilitate questions, the virtual seminars will be limited to about 30 participants per session.

The seminars will cover Medicare eligibility and coverage, prescription drug coverage (Medicare Part

D), and details on Educators' Medicare Supplement, the Medicare supplement endorsed by NSEA-Retired and underwritten by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska. Educators' Medicare Supplement offers both Plan F and Plan G supplements to subscribers. It is only available to EHA subscribers and/or NSEA-Retired members and their spouses when they turn 65. Educators' Medicare supplement pays for medical costs that Medicare does not cover, and it has an optional dental plan that is superior to any individual dental plan offered to Medicare subscribers.

The same information will be provided at all of the seminars, whether in-person or virtual, so you only need to attend one of the seminars to get full information. Registration for the seminars is required. To register for any of the seminars, visit [NebraskaBlue.com/NSEAseminars](http://NebraskaBlue.com/NSEAseminars). You will need a valid email address to register, and you will get a confirmation email when you register. You need to register at least one week prior to the date of the seminar you choose. You may call Blue Cross at 877-721-2583 for assistance.

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## Fight COVID-19 Fraud in Nebraska!

By: Roger Rea, NSEA-Retired Vice President

Medicare fraud costs all of us. When fraud occurs, not only does that impact the health of the Medicare trust fund, it also causes our Medicare supplements to pay fraudulent charges! If Medicare pays a fraudulent charge, the Supplement is obligated to pay its share of the charge, too.

Recently Bill Forsee, an OEA-Retired member, called to let me know that he has received several sets of COVID-19 test kits through the mail that he did not order. There were multiple sources for the test kits, including: FDM Ventures, LLC; ION DIAG; Chicago Care Lab Services; and Mars Lab Services, Inc. He got the tests mailed to him in the US mail (he did not request them), and then got an Explanation of Benefits from both Medicare and his Medicare supplement detailing the total charges. He called Medicare, and they told him that they wished that more Medicare subscribers were reporting this kind of fraud to them.

If you have received COVID-19 test kits that you did not order, you are encouraged to call Medicare at: 1-800-633-4227 (1-800-MEDICARE) to report the fraud. Be sure to have your Medicare number handy when you call, as well as the name of the provider who sent you the test kits, the amount that was charged (you can get that from the Explanation of Benefits, EOB, form), and the date that the charge appeared on your EOB.

If you want home tests for COVID, up to four free COVID tests per household are once again available from the US Government. To order your supply of free tests, go to [www.covid.gov/tests](http://www.covid.gov/tests).

Fraud increases the premiums that are needed to provide both Medicare and your supplemental coverage. Fight back! Report any fraudulent charges to Medicare. Your thanks will be lower premium increases in the future!

## Check Your Medicare Part D coverage Oct. 15 – Dec. 7

Medicare Part D, the prescription drug benefit, has open enrollment from Oct. 15 – Dec. 7 every year. Medicare subscribers are encouraged to use the Medicare website, [www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov), each fall to find an appropriate provider for the next year. You can change Part D providers each year without penalty, but you must do so before the December 7 deadline in order for your new coverage to begin on January 1.

Each year Part D providers can change tiers for the drugs they cover (which changes the pricing for those drugs), drop coverage of drugs, and change the preferred pharmacies and premium structure for their plans. Even if the list of drugs that you take does not change, it is likely that the amount you pay out-of-pocket for the drugs you take will change from year to year. By using the Medicare website to find an appropriate Part D provider during the open enrollment period, you may be able to save money!

## Medical COLA is paid Oct. 3

OPS retirees who have been retired for ten years or more receive an increase in the Medical COLA benefit from OSERS each October. The payment is \$10 for each year that you have been retired. The

benefit starts in your eleventh year of retirement (after you have been retired for 10 years) at \$100 extra, and increases \$10 per year for each following year until it reaches \$250 in your 26<sup>th</sup> year of retirement. It remains at that level for the rest of your life. The Medical COLA is paid directly to retirees, and is independent of the kind of insurance you have in retirement.

You must have 20 years of service credit to earn the maximum benefit (\$10 per year of retirement). If you had fewer than 20 years of service credit, the benefit is pro-rated. If you have taxes withheld from your pension, the amount will be slightly reduced.

If your retirement check increased in October, thank the Medical COLA!

## OEA-Retired

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## Smart phone app saves the day!

By: Roger Rea, NSEA-Retired Vice President

In July, I attended a conference in Orlando, FL. One of my meetings was on the second floor of the Convention Center. Since I did not see any stairs or escalators, I asked one of the cleaning staff members if there was an elevator nearby. She indicated to me that she did not speak English well, and did not understand what I was asking. My pidgin Spanish was not much help!

The employee took out her smart phone, pulled up a translation program, and motioned for me to speak. I asked again (in English) where the elevator was located, and the phone translated my words to printed Spanish on her phone. Once she read what I wanted, she immediately pointed me to the nearest elevator! I now have this app on my phone.

For the iPhone, there is a pre-installed Translate app that you launch. From the top-left pull-

down menu, select your native language. From the top-right pull down menu, select the language the other person is speaking. From there, you can either type in what you want translated or use the microphone icon to speak it. What you say will be displayed in both languages selected.

For Android phones, download and install the free Google Translate app from the Google Play store. Launch the app, and then from the left pull-down menu (above the round Microphone icon) choose your native language, and the language the other person is speaking from the right pull-down menu. If you tap on the Conversation icon, as each of you speak, what's said gets displayed on the screen in the appropriate translation.

I'm glad to have this app for my next vacation in our multilingual world! Happy travels!

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