

THE EDUCATORS'

ADVOCATE

JAN/FEB 2026

Volume 57 | Issue 3

South Dakota Legislative Preview

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NEA Member* Exclusive

A trusted and valuable benefit

As an NEA member, did you know you receive \$1,000 of term life insurance at **no cost** to you? You're already enrolled in the NEA® Complimentary Life Insurance Plan, but it's a good time to make sure you've selected a beneficiary.

When you do, you can have some peace of mind that your loved ones will receive their benefit in a time of need. This unique benefit helps ensure educators like you have additional coverage beyond what may be provided through your district. It's just one of the many ways your union membership works hard for you.

**Scan the code or go to
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your beneficiary information.**



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Vision

We envision valued education professionals providing quality public education for all students.

Mission

South Dakota Education Association ensures the collective voice for South Dakota public education professionals.

JAN/FEB 2026

Volume 57 | Issue 3

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President's Corner

Stephanie Hageman

SDEA President

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Standing Strong for South Dakota's Students and Educators

As we begin a new year and legislative session, I reaffirm my commitment to supporting you. Every day, you demonstrate passion and resilience for your students and communities. As your president, I will ensure your voices are heard, your expertise valued, and your autonomy protected. You deserve respect as professionals, and we must expect nothing less. Achieving this requires us to stand up for our profession and, ultimately, for our students.

The 101st Legislative Session presents significant challenges. Governor Rhoden's proposed 0% increase for education funding puts schools, staff, and students at risk. Classrooms need more support, not less, so freezing funding is not an option. Student needs are increasing, educator shortages persist, and fair pay is essential to attract and retain quality educators. A funding freeze takes us backward when our students need progress.

The continued push for voucher programs, including Education Savings Accounts, charter initiatives, and federally supported vouchers, is also concerning. These programs divert critical public funds from public schools to private or alternative schools that lack transparency and accountability. South Dakota's public schools are the foundation of our communities and serve most of our children. Weakening them undermines our state.

NEA President Becky Pringle said, "The responsibility to fight for our students, public

education, and educators is ours." Public education remains the foundation of our democracy and gives every child a chance, no matter their background. These are the values we must hold on to and fight for.

To stand true to these principles, we must speak out and advocate for our students and colleagues. Together, we can create the supportive classrooms our students deserve and oppose threats to South Dakota's public schools.

Your Role in This Fight

Your involvement matters. Advocacy matters, and lawmakers listen when educators speak up. Here's how you can help:

- **Stay informed:** The Legislative Session runs Jan. 13–Mar. 13, 2026.
- **Sign up for the SDEA Lobby Line** for news and action alerts.
- **Contact your legislators:** Your voice matters.
- **Share your story:** Personal experiences change minds.
- **Attend Legislative Coffees and Cracker Barrels** to speak directly with lawmakers.
- **Join us for SDEA Lobby Day on March 2, 2026** to show the strength and unity of South Dakota educators.

We are stronger together. Let's fight for the future of public education in South Dakota.

Stephanie Hageman



A Word from Our NEA Director

Kelsey Lovseth

NEA Director

kelsey.lovseth@gmail.com

Do Your Local Bylaws Reflect Today's Practice?

Why Local Association Bylaws Matter

Bylaws guide local education associations by clarifying roles, decisions, and member rights. They resolve disputes, guide actions, and ensure transparency.

The South Dakota Education Association (SDEA) and the National Education Association (NEA) each have bylaws. As a NEA Board Director, I assist local affiliates in auditing their local bylaws. This isn't just bureaucratic; the audit ensures governing documents remain useful, legal, and aligned with current practice. More guidance will follow in a future email to local leaders.

Reasons to Review Your Local Bylaws

Match current practice — Procedures and roles evolve; audits confirm bylaws reflect reality.

- Preserve clarity — Clear bylaws reduce confusion and prevent conflict.
- Stay compliant — Updates may be needed to comply with state law or NEA/SDEA policy.
- Engage members — Accessible bylaws encourage participation.
- Protect continuity — They safeguard institutional memory during leadership changes.

Questions Every Local Should Ask

- Do they match how we conduct elections and meetings?
- Are officers' responsibilities and term limits clear?
- Can members propose amendments easily?
- When were they last reviewed?
- Do they align with SDEA, NEA, and state requirements?

Next Steps

- Review every 2–4 years or after major changes.
- Invite your SDEA NEA Board rep for guidance.
- Form a small committee with active and past leaders.
- Use plain language; remove outdated provisions.
- Follow amendment procedures and share updates widely.

Final Thought

Bylaws are more than paperwork—they're the foundation of fair, effective governance. Keep them up to date and use SDEA/NEA resources to ensure your playbook serves members well.



Know Your Rights with Brooke

Student Loans

Happy holidays, everyone!

I am writing today to give you an update on student loans, specifically loan forgiveness. I am sure many of you are aware of and impacted by the rapid changes happening in the student loan landscape, particularly as it relates to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. The PSLF program was created in 2007, promising forgiveness of the balance of federal student-loan debt after ten years of public service. Recently, the Department of Education (by Executive Order) has threatened to revoke this promise to employees in cities or organizations that engage in activities with a “substantial illegal purpose” as deemed by the education secretary. As it stands today, nearly half of all people who have received PSLF forgiveness work in education.

Could this impact you? Anything is possible, but it is not likely at this time. This Executive Order was intended to impact nonprofits, specifically ones involved in immigration support and those aimed at advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, the vague definition

of “substantial illegal purpose” has caused some to worry about the widespread implications on school districts, particularly ones that provide services or support policies protecting LGBTQ youth.

This November, the NEA joined in on a lawsuit against the Department of Education to preserve the PSLF program and invalidate the recent eligibility rule changes. This will now play out in the court system and potentially impact the July 1, 2026 effective date of the new rule.

As always, if you have any questions about PSLF litigation or how this may impact you, please feel free to reach out to your UniServ Representative. NEA member benefits also provides you access to the SAVI student loan navigation services.

I hope you enjoy your well-deserved Christmas break.

Brooke Quinlivan

SDEA General Counsel

605-224-9263

brooke.quinlivan@sdea.org



Contact a UniServ Director today!

Shannon Maxon | Western UniServ Director | Shannon.Maxon@sdea.org

LouAnn Jensen | EGL UniServ Director | LouAnn.Jensen@sdea.org

Rich Mittelstedt | SEE UniServ Director | Richard.Mittelstedt@sdea.org

Sandy Arseneault | Plains UniServ Director | Sandy.Arseneault@sdea.org

Steve Binkley | Eastern Prairie UniServ Director | Steve.Binkley@sdea.org

605-224-9263

Get Ready for SDEA Lobby Day 2026!

Mark your calendars for Monday, March 2, 2026! Join us for an exciting and informative trip to South Dakota's State Capitol in Pierre. This is your chance to network with fellow Association members, engage with your elected officials, and gain insights from committee discussions and the afternoon session.



But that's not all! We're also gearing up to fight against school vouchers and advocate for our students and public education. Your voice matters: this is the perfect opportunity to make it heard.



Here's a sneak peek at what to expect:

- **Sunday Evening:** Meet with our SDEA Lobby Team.
- **Monday Morning:** Head to the Capitol bright and early for a day full of impactful activities.

SDEA will cover your hotel costs! About a week before the event, you'll receive a detailed agenda and hotel information.

Sign Up for Lobby Day TODAY!

<http://bit.ly/4qC4dus>



LOBBY LINE

South Dakota Education Association

it's ABOUT OUR KIDS. SDEA South Dakota Education Association

Stay Informed. Stay Empowered. Join the Lobby Line!

What is Lobby Line?

A must-have e-newsletter for SDEA members that delivers updates, key talking points, and insider info on:

- **Education funding**
- **Vouchers**
- **Professional Rights**
- **Students' Rights**
- **And much more!**

Whether you're advocating for your students and profession or just want to stay informed, Lobby Line helps you track how decisions are made and how you can make your voice heard.

2026 Legislative Preview:

What Educators Should Expect—and How You Can Help Move Public Education Forward

With the 2026 legislative session coming up, South Dakota educators must be on alert. Decisions in Pierre about funding and policy will affect classrooms for years to come. Here's what to expect and how you can speak up.



Governor Rhoden's Budget: A Funding Freeze and \$14 Million in Pay

In early December, Governor Rhoden announced a plan to freeze K-12

funding. This is a change from the usual yearly increases that help schools keep up with inflation. Without extra money, schools will have a harder time covering rising costs and keeping educators.

However, the Governor left \$14 million unappropriated in his budget. Lawmakers now have discretion on how to use it. Will they invest in classrooms, teacher pay, or student programs—or divert it elsewhere? SDEA will advocate strongly for these dollars to support public education. Your voice will be essential in reminding legislators that students must come first.

Property Tax Reduction Task Force: Cuts on the Table

Another important issue is the **Property Tax Reduction Task Force's recommendation to cut** property taxes by **reducing state government by 5%, including public**

schools. Governor Rhoden and some lawmakers have opposed this idea, but the debate will still be contentious. If these cuts happen, school budgets will shrink. Districts may have to make tough choices about staff, programs, and student services.

Educators should be ready to explain why **steady funding is important** for student success and how cutting school budgets for tax relief will hurt their local communities and schools.

Voucher Legislation: A Renewed Push for Privatization

There will likely be new attempts to start voucher programs or expand tax-credit scholarships. These plans would send public money to private schools. This leaves fewer resources for most students who attend public schools. SDEA will oppose any bills that weaken funding or accountability for public education.

Educators can help by sharing real stories about how public schools serve every student, no matter what their income, ability, or background. Explain why taking funds away from public schools especially hurts rural communities.

Culture Wars: Attacks on Books, Librarians, and Curriculum

The national trend of politicizing education will continue in Pierre. We expect bills targeting **school libraries, book selections, and curriculum content.** These often come under the banner of “parental rights.” Such

measures threaten intellectual freedom and put librarians and teachers in the crosshairs.

SDEA will oppose censorship and support **local control and professional judgment**. Educators should be ready to talk about why having a range of age-appropriate materials matters. Explain how it hurts students when politics decides what they can read.

Election-Year Politics: Expect Heated Debates

Since 2026 is an election year, lawmakers will want to make headlines. This often leads to bills that do not address real classroom needs. While these debates get attention, SDEA will keep the focus on students and educators.

Continued Push for Free School Meals

There may be good news from efforts to expand **free school meals** for students. Hunger makes it hard for kids to learn. Making sure every child has healthy food helps them do better in school.

With major topics at stake, educators have an important role to play this session.

Your voice makes a difference. Here are some ways you can help support public education:

- **Stay Informed** – Follow SDEA’s Lobby

Line for updates and alerts throughout the session.

- **Reach out to lawmakers by calling, emailing, or meeting with them.** Share how funding freezes and voucher plans affect your students. Consider attending SDEA’s Lobby Day on March 2, 2026.
- **Tell your story, as personal experiences matter.** Explain how enough funding helps with classroom resources, student support, and keeping teachers.
- **Mobilize your community** by encouraging parents and local leaders to speak up for public schools.
- **Focus on Students** – Frame every conversation around what kids need to succeed: qualified teachers, safe schools, and access to learning supports and materials.

Final Thought

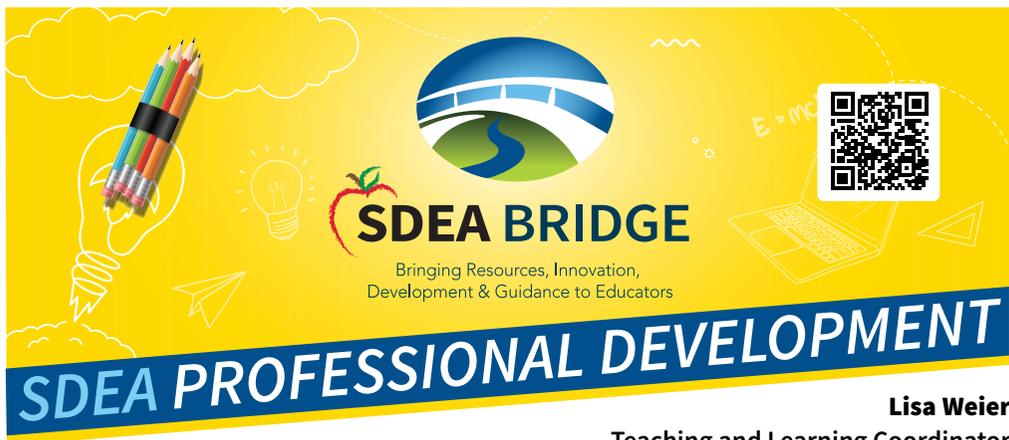
With big debates over funding and tax cuts, the stakes are high. But if we work together, educators can make sure lawmakers hear this message: **public schools are the heart of our communities, and every child deserves the resources to thrive.**

When we speak with one voice, we can protect and strengthen public education for all.

Local Treasurer’s Training

- **Responsibilities as an Association Officer**
- **Reporting Association Income and Expenses**
- **Important Tax Topics**
- **Membership Dues/ Reconciliation**
- **ACH payment option**

Contact Holly Frederick at holly.frederick@sdea.org and Lathie Under Baggage at lathie.underbaggage@sdea.org to set up your training date!



Lisa Weier

Teaching and Learning Coordinator

Lisa.Weier@sdea.org

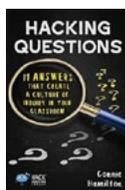
Asynchronous Book Studies and Independent Study Courses



January 6 – February 27
Mindful Learning: Unlocking the Gifts of the Teenage Brain

by Dr. Wilnic Gideon

*This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.



March 2 – April 24
Hacking Questions: 11 Answers That Create a Culture of Inquiry in Your Classroom

by Connie Hamilton

*This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.

January 19 – March 13
The Heart-Centered Teacher

by Regie Routman

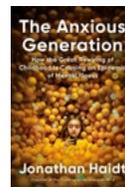
*This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.



March 2 – May 8
The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

by Jonathan Haidt

*This book is worth two graduate credits or thirty CECH.



February 2 – March 27
The Missing Link to Help Them Think: Connecting Executive Function and SEL Skills to Boost Student Achievement

by Marilee Sprenger

* This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.



March 16 – May 8
From Burnt Out to Fired Up: Reigniting Your Passion for Teaching

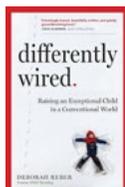
by Morgane Michael

*This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.

February 16 – April 10
Differently Wired-Raising an Exceptional Child in a Conventional World

by Deborah Reber

*This book is worth one graduate credit or fifteen CECH.



Courses are free with your SDEA membership and \$50 for non-members. Registration will open two weeks before the start date.

SDEA/NEA OPPORTUNITIES

GRANT, SCHOLARSHIPS, CAREER

SDEA/NEA GORDON HORGEN SCHOLARSHIP

Gordon Horgen Memorial Scholarship

The South Dakota Education Association/NEA is calling for applications for the Gordon Horgen Memorial Scholarship, which is awarded to Native American students who are planning on entering the teaching profession. This scholarship was created by the 2014 Representative Assembly to honor the late Gordon Horgen from Winner.

Deadline: *February 15*

SDEA/NEA RAMIA BOERSMA SCHOLARSHIP

Ramia Boersma Scholarship

The South Dakota Education Association/NEA awards scholarships to outstanding students who are planning on entering the teaching profession. The Association may annually award up to three \$750 scholarships for each academic year.

Deadline: *February 15*

SDEA/NEA EDUCATORS RISING SCHOLARSHIP

Educators Rising Scholarship

The South Dakota Education Association (SDEA) Board of Directors is thrilled to announce the creation of the **Educators Rising Scholarship**. This four-year scholarship is designed to invest in the future educators of South Dakota, providing vital support to high school seniors who are passionate about pursuing a career in education.

Deadline: *February 15*

SDEA/NEA EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION GRANT

SDEA/NEA Educational Innovation Grant

The SDEA/NEA Educational Innovation Grant Program provides grants to members in support of innovative educational and student-oriented projects. The grant program funds new member-led projects. It does not fund projects on an on-going basis. The SDEA/NEA Educational Innovation Grants give preference to proposals that address student achievement, cultural diversity issues, include community partnerships, and can be duplicated by others.

Deadline: *May 1*

For more information on all grants and awards offered by SDEA, visit SDEA.org.



Enroll Today!

Online professional development courses to fit your educational needs. Take discounted courses when and where you want after returning to school this fall!

Learn More: virtualeduc.com/sdea

Honored Women Educators of South Dakota

The purpose of HWE of South Dakota is to recognize outstanding South Dakota women educators and to promise better relationships among women engaged in educational work.

Honored Women Educators of South Dakota Nominee

Because it can be difficult to get all necessary information on the nominee, while not divulging the fact that the person is being nominated, a new format was voted on in August 2017. The new format is to submit the information that can be obtained, with **items listed below required**. Submit the information by **May 15, 2026** to: Amanda Sonne, 421 West 12th Avenue, Mitchell, SD 57301. Nominations can be submitted electronically to: amanda.sonne@k12.sd.us

Then the nominee will be notified and will be asked to complete the form by **May 29, 2026**. Those selected for membership in Honored Women Educators of South Dakota will be notified and will be invited to the 2026 luncheon.

Each SDEA Member may submit one nominee per year.

Requirements of nominees:

1. Be active in education at present and be a present SDEA member. Or, if retired, the nominee must have been an SDEA member during her active career
2. Have a minimum of four years of college
3. Should have spent at least ten years in the field of education
4. Be fully qualified educationally for their field of work
5. Have made major contributions in the area of education
6. Should be active in the community and exhibit character traits worthy of the honor of membership
7. Eligible for membership are classroom teachers, administrators, librarians, supervisors, and former educators

Submit the following information on a word document.

1. Full name of nominee
2. Mailing address of nominee
3. Phone number of nominee
4. Email address of nominee
5. Present position of nominee, if currently teaching; past position, if retired
6. Write a paragraph that reveals the personality and real worth of the nominee
7. Name, signature, addresses, phone number of nominator who submits the nomination, and date
8. Submit 2 or 3 letters of recommendation from others who are familiar with the contributions of the nominee. Possible choices could be co-workers, administrators, students or former students, or parents of present or former students. If the nominator does not submit the letters of recommendation, the nominee will be asked to do so.

Honored Women Educators of South Dakota Book Award

The \$500 Book Award is for a female student majoring in the field of education who is in the second semester of her junior year. The award is based on financial need.

Requirements:

- Minimum of 2.5 GPA on a 4.0 scale
- Attach a copy of most recent transcript
- Attach a list of two (2) contact persons if follow-up reference should be needed.
- Write an essay of not less than 250 words on “How I Feel I will Make a Difference in the Field of Education” (Attach to this application)

Deadline date for application, including transcript, personal contacts, and essay is **May 15, 2026**.

Submit the information to:

Amanda Sonne
421 West 12th Ave.
Mitchell, SD 57301

amanda.sonne@k12.sd.us

**Applications
for both
Awards**

<https://bit.ly/4rLB1Sl>



Bargaining Trainings

Is your team ready for bargaining in the spring? Get prepared by attending one of SDEA's trainings. These sessions are for members only. Register yourself or your whole team for one or more of these trainings!

January 24 | Plains

After the Plains Unit meeting at SDEA

January 31 | Western | 10am–4:30pm MT

Clubhouse Hotel Ballroom in Rapid City

February 7 | SEE | 10am–3pm CST

Beresford Public Library

February 7 | Plains | 10am–3pm MT

Dupree School

February 7 | EGL | 11am–3pm CST

Milbank Pizza Ranch

February 21 | SEE | 10am–3pm CST

Madison Public Library

REGISTER NOW

<https://bit.ly/4rMPpck>



Thank You for Celebrating American Education Week!

A big thank you to all our SDEA members for making American Education Week such a success! The flood of “I ❤️ Public Schools” t-shirt photos was amazing—our educators looked fantastic as they celebrated their schools, students, and communities.

These photos showcase the pride and commitment that make our schools exceptional.





I hope you all enjoyed the holidays and are off to a terrific new year. Your retired association has been busy holding socials and pre-retirement /retirement seminars across the state. During these events, we've been discussing the upcoming legislative session and tight budget; the changes to Medicare and Medicaid; the necessity of a will, medical power of attorney, and financial power of attorney; the process of filing for SDRS retirement; and how much you can work without affecting your retirement, among many other topics of interest. If you are interested in hosting a seminar or social, please get in touch with LouAnn Jensen at 605-220-1688 or louann.jensen@sdea.org.

SDEA is having its annual Lobby Day on March 1-2. They will pay your mileage and double room occupancy Sunday night, feed you lunch and dinner (breakfast is on your own at the hotel), and guide you through the lobbying

process. Please try to attend. As retirees, we need to represent our active teachers who are still in the classroom and unable to attend.

If you have a child or grandchild in college who is studying to be a teacher and is a member of Aspiring Educators, please have them apply for one of the \$3,500 John Kinnaman scholarships available through NEA Retired. For more information, check the NEA website. The deadline for application is April 15.

We appreciate each and every one of you! Don't forget to keep us updated when you change your address, email, or phone so that we can keep in touch.

Mary Jane Chiles
SDEA Retired President

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS

SDEA Retired Staff Liaison:
LouAnn Jensen | 605-220-1688
LouAnn.Jensen@sdea.org



***Join SDEA
Retired Now***
bit.ly/3WNrNGA

SDEA Members Only:

Sign up and log into the new SDEA.org to access Members Only documents and information like the SDEA Board of Director minutes and Educators Employment Liability (EEL) Program documents.

UPCOMING EVENTS

January

- 20 SEE Unit Meeting @ Madison, SD
- 24 Plains Unit Meeting @ Pierre
- 24 Plains Bargaining Training
- 26 EGL Unit Meeting
- 30-31 SDEA Board of Directors Meeting
- 31 SDEA Budget Committee
- 31 Western Bargaining Training @ Rapid City

February

- 7 SEE Bargaining Training @ Beresford
- 7 Plains Bargaining Training @ Dupree
- 7 EGL Bargaining Training @ Milbank
- 15 Educators Rising, Gordon Horgen, and Ramia Boersma Scholarship deadlines
- 15 SDEA Budget Committee
- 21 SEE Bargaining Training @ Madison

March

- 1 SDEA Budget Committee
- 2 **Lobby Day**
- 8 SDEA BOD Meeting
- 10 Eastern Prairie Unit Meeting
- 14 Plains Unit Meeting
- 16 EGL Mini RA
- 17 SEE Unit meeting
- 17 Western Unit Meeting
- 26-27 SDEA BOD Meeting
- 28-29 **SDEA Representative Assembly**

411 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

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@sdea.org



@SDEAEducators



South Dakota
Education Association



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